

For Women, Breadwinning Can Be Dangerous: Gendered Resource Theory and Wife Abuse

To explain wife abuse, we offer a refinement of relative resource theory, gendered resource theory, which argues that the effect of relative resources is contingent upon husbands' gender ideologies. We use data from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (N = 4,296) to test three theories of wife abuse. Resource theory receives no support. Relative resource theory receives limited support. Gendered resource theory receives strong support. Wives' share of relative incomes is positively related to likelihood of abuse only for traditional husbands. The findings suggest that both cultural and structural forces must be considered to understand marriage as a context for social interactions in which we create our gendered selves.

Marriage is often a structural context of opportunity for husbands and wives to behave in ways that validate their identities as male and female, that is, to display the visible aspects of their gender ideologies. Studies of wife abuse have tended to partition structure and culture. This article examines the intersection of the two

and argues that the culture moderates the effect of structure.

Two social structural perspectives commonly used to explain wife abuse are *resource theory* and *relative resource theory*. These theories suggest that level of resources is the primary predictor of wife abuse. Specifically, they argue that married men who have few resources to offer (resource theory), or fewer resources than their wives (relative resource theory), are more likely than their resource-rich counterparts to use violence. Violence serves as a compensation for their shortage of resources. These theories have received support in a plethora of studies (Anderson, 1997; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; McCloskey, 1996). These structural explanations ignore cultural variables, however, and take for granted that married men *want* to be breadwinners, particularly in comparison to their wives. In other words, rather than accurately reflecting the variability in men's gender ideologies, such arguments assume all men to be traditional.

In this study, we show the importance of gender ideology in understanding wife abuse by making the link between resources and ideology more explicit. We review resource theory and relative resource theory and their predictions concerning the occurrence of wife abuse. We then test both of these theories' predictions against our own gendered resource theory, which argues that the effect of relative resources on the occurrence of wife abuse is moderated by husbands' gender ideologies. That is, we show how structure and culture interact to

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create social spaces for the construction of alternative masculinities. We combine structural perspectives with a framework of gender inequality to understand and predict which husbands are more likely to abuse their wives.

REVIEW OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Perhaps the most often cited theory of why wife abuse occurs is Goode's (1971) application of Blood and Wolfe's (1960) resource theory. Goode conceptualizes violence as a resource much like material resources. Violence or the threat of violence can be used to gain obedience and compliance in the absence of material resources. He argues that husbands command more force within families than other members do and that husbands with the most material resources are least likely to use violence because their material resources assure obedience and compliance. Violence, or the threat of violence, serves as an alternative to material resources as a power base. Therefore, this theory leads to the prediction that husbands with lower social class status would be more likely than husbands with higher class status to use violence. Resource theory is supported by many studies which indicate that men with lower levels of income, prestige, and education are more likely to abuse their wives (Hoffman, Demo, & Edwards, 1994; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; McCall & Shields, 1986; Okun, 1986).

Although resource theory emphasizes men's absolute level of resources, others modify resource theory by emphasizing husbands' and wives' relative resources as predictors of wife abuse (Macmillan & Gartner, 1999; McCloskey, 1996). This relative resource theory argues that it is not so much men's lack of resources that predicts wife abuse but lack of resources relative to their wives. Scholars who employ this perspective use measures of status inconsistency and argue that when men do not have a superior status relative to their wives, they use violence to regain power. These studies assume that husbands want to have more resources than their wives. That is, they assume that husbands hold traditional gender ideologies. We argue that this is a problematic assumption.

Several studies use relative resources as predictors of abuse. Macmillan and Gartner (1999) find that wives who are employed when their husbands are not are more likely to be abused. Anderson (1997), McCloskey (1996), and Melzer

(2002) find that women who have higher incomes than their husbands are more likely to be abused. Though they do not find support for relative resource theory cross-sectionally, Fox, Benson, DeMaris, and Van Wyk (2002) find that women whose earnings increase over time relative to their husbands' have an increased risk of violence against them. Others find that wives with greater occupational prestige than their husbands (Gelles, 1974; Yllö & Bograd, 1988) or higher educational attainment (Gelles; O'Brien, 1971) are more likely to be abused.

Both resource theory and relative resource theory view possession of material resources as the primary predictor of abuse in marriages. They conceptualize violence as an alternative resource, and they argue that when men do not have resources, they are more likely to abuse their wives than when men do. They differ, however, in their predictions or their expectations of the conditions under which men are most likely to abuse. Resource theorists expect that men with the fewest resources will be the most likely to abuse. Relative resource theorists expect that men who have fewer resources than their wives, or relatively few resources, will be the most likely to abuse. In both these cases, the primary predictor is resources, which is typically operationalized as education, earnings, or employment.

Although we agree that resources are important, we think that these theories have downplayed the importance of gender ideologies in their explanations of wife abuse. We extend relative resource theory by adding gender ideology to its predictions. Knowing husbands' ideas about what they believe to be appropriate masculinity and femininity enables us to see whether and how such ideologies matter in the relationship between relative resources and wife abuse.

Gender ideologies are how one identifies oneself with regard to marital and family roles traditionally linked to gender. Gender ideology can be distinguished from gender identity, which Goffman (1977, p. 315) suggested is "the deepest sense of what one is," in that gender identities are self-definitions such as male or female, whereas ideologies are the elements that make up that definition. Two men who think of themselves as male (their gender identity) can have different ideas about what being male implies (their gender ideologies). One man may assert that being male means he has little

responsibility for domestic labor, whereas another man may feel that being male means doing an equal share of household work. Marriage and other intimate relationships provide arenas in which these ideologies are played out. In addition to its manifest functions of providing emotional and economic support and enhancing childbearing and childrearing, marriage also serves the latent function of providing an opportunity for husbands and wives to behave in ways that validate their identities as male and female, that is, to display the visible aspects of their gender ideologies.

We believe that gender ideology may moderate the effect of husbands' relative resources on abuse by changing the meaning of relative resources. Gender ideologies range from traditional—characterized by the belief that husbands should be primary breadwinners and wives should remain at home—to egalitarian, with the belief that husbands and wives should share the work involved in family life. In many situations, men's gender ideologies are consistent with their family positions and they can use their familial roles to reinforce their masculine identity. For example, for men who hold traditional gender ideologies and who are able to provide all or most of the household income, family is an opportunity structure for validating masculine identity. The traditional man who cannot provide economic support for his family, however, does not have the opportunity to validate his masculinity through income providership. For men whose gender ideology and thus masculine identity is not necessarily linked to economic providership, whether they earn the greater proportion of household income is irrelevant to familial opportunities for validating masculinity.

Thus, gender ideology provides a *lens* through which to view the effect of relative resources on wife abuse. Husbands' gender ideology creates vastly different contexts within which relative income is experienced. We test for the effect of relative income conditional on husbands' gender ideology. In summary, in this study, we test the competing predictions of resource theory, relative resource theory, and our refinement, which we call gendered resource theory.

Drawing on these three theoretical perspectives, we make several predictions about the effects of resources and relative resources on the likelihood of wife abuse. In this study, our indicator of resources is provided by measures

of the husband's and the wife's earnings because earnings are the most direct measure of providership. First, resource theory would predict that (controlling for other factors in the model) husbands' earnings should be negatively associated with likelihood of wife abuse. Independent of wives' incomes, wife abuse should be *most* likely in marriages with low-income husbands and *least* likely in marriages with high-income husbands.

Second, relative resource theory would predict that husbands' earnings relative to their wives' earnings should be negatively associated with wife abuse. Wife abuse should be most likely in marriages where the husbands' earnings are smaller than their wives'—in other words, in households where the wife is the primary breadwinner—and least likely in households where the husband is the primary breadwinner.

With gendered resource theory, we expect that husbands' relative income will interact with gender ideology. On the one hand, for marriages involving egalitarian husbands—that is, those who believe that husbands and wives should share responsibility for both market and nonmarket production—husbands' relative income will not be associated with the likelihood of wife abuse. On the other hand, for marriages with traditional husbands—those who believe that husbands should be the primary breadwinner—husbands' relative income should be strongly and negatively associated with the likelihood of wife abuse. From the perspective of gendered resource theory, wives who are primary breadwinners and who have traditional husbands are at the greatest risk of abuse.

Other Considerations

Wife abuse is negatively related to age. Younger men seem to be more prone to wife abuse than older men (Egley, 1991; Gelles, 1993). Race is also an important predictor (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), perhaps because minority race/ethnicity may restrict men's opportunities for providership (Anderson, 1997). We also controlled for wives' and husbands' educational attainment (Hoffman et al., 1994; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). Education may be conceptualized as a resource (Kaukinen, 2004) and is correlated with income. Substance abuse, particularly the abuse of alcohol, is

another common significant predictor of physical wife abuse, though the theoretical rationale is disputed (Gelles; Kaukinen).

Controlling for region of the country and community size provides an acknowledgment of possible geographic- and community-level processes (Browning, 2002). Marital duration, a characteristic of the relationship, is negatively associated with physical abuse resource (Kaukinen, 2004), whereas number of children may be a relationship stressor (DeMaris, Benson, Fox, Hill, & Van Wyk, 2003) or may create an alternative form of dependency (Kaukinen).

METHOD

Sample

We use data from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH1). The survey was designed and carried out at the Center for Demography and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, under the direction of Larry Bumpass and James Sweet. The fieldwork was done by the Institute for Survey Research at Temple University. The NSFH1 consists of interviews with a national probability sample of 13,017 respondents. The in-person interviews (supplemented by self-administered survey questions) were conducted between March 1987 and May 1988, and lasted on average 1 hour 40 minutes (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988).

The survey includes a main sample of 9,643 respondents who represent the noninstitutional U.S. population aged 19 and older. In addition, several population groups were oversampled: minority groups (Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Chicanos), single parents, persons with stepchildren, cohabiting persons, and persons who recently married. One adult household member was randomly selected to be the primary respondent. A shorter self-administered questionnaire was given to the spouse or cohabiting partner of the primary respondent. The design is cross-sectional, with several retrospective sequences on earlier experience. Because of the oversampling mentioned above, the data were weighted using the married couple weight.

In the NSFH data, there are 5,640 married couples for whom information on both spouses is available. We analyze the responses given by 4,296 couples (76% of the married couples in the sample) for whom codable data are available

on all the variables in the analyses. Most of the missing data were attributable to the earnings variables; 8.9% ($n = 502$) of the couples did not have codable values for both wife's and husband's earnings. Approximately 8% ($n = 460$) of the sample had one or more non-responses to the items comprising the traditionalism scale and they were dropped from the analyses; about 7% ($n = 408$) of the couples did not provide enough information to construct the abuse variable (described below).

Measurement

Dependent variable. After the respondents were asked whether and how often in the past year the respondent and her or his spouse argued about household tasks, money, spending time together, sex, having another child, in-laws, and children, they were asked whether any of their marital disagreements became physical. This question screened the following series of items loosely based on the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). Those who indicated that they did have arguments during the past year that became physical were then asked how many fights during the past year resulted in the respondent "hitting, shoving, or throwing things" at their partner. Respondents were asked to number the fights in which their spouse had hit, shoved, or thrown things at them. Regardless of their answers to these two questions, respondents were asked whether they have "been cut, bruised, or seriously injured in a fight" with their spouse, and whether their spouse had been cut, bruised, or seriously injured fighting with them. The same questions were asked of spouses of primary respondents, providing data from both husbands' and wives' perspectives.

From these items, we construct a dichotomous outcome variable that measures whether the respondent (or if a male respondent, the respondent's wife) has ever been a victim of physical nonsexual abuse by her husband. Szinovacz and Egley (1995) provide a convincing case indicating considerable underreporting of marital violence in the NSFH. Using couple data provides us with more accurate prevalence estimates than reliance on data from only one member of a couple. We code an instance of *wife abuse* if either the husband or the wife reports that the husband has hit, shoved, or thrown things at the wife. We also code an instance of *wife abuse* when either the husband or the wife

reports that the wife has been cut, bruised, or seriously injured in a fight with the husband and they did not report an instance of hitting, shoving, or throwing things. There are other ways to be injured other than being hit, shoved, or having things thrown at you.

Predictor variables. Absolute resources is operationalized by *husband's income*, the husband's own report of his earnings from employment during the previous year. Where this report from the husband is missing, we use the wife's report of her husband's earnings. Initially, we logged husband's income but found that this transformation did not change the substantive conclusions drawn from the analyses, so all the analyses reported here use the raw (untransformed) value. *Husband's relative income* is the husband's proportion of total couple earnings using the husband's report of his own income. If the husband's report is missing, we use the wife's report of her husband's earnings. This measure is calculated for all respondents, regardless of employment status.

NSFH respondents were asked a series of questions that were used to construct a summated index of *traditionalism*. On a 1–7 scale, where 1 = *strongly approve* and 7 = *strongly disapprove*, respondents were asked how much they approved of “mothers who work full-time when their youngest child is under age five” and “mothers who work part-time when their youngest child is under age five.” On a 1–5 scale, where 1 = *strongly agree* and 5 = *strongly disagree*, respondents were also asked how much they agreed with the following four items: “It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family,” “Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed,” “Parents should encourage just as much independence from their daughters as in their sons,” and “If a husband and wife both work full-time, they should share housework tasks equally.” Appropriate item scoring was reversed to produce an index where higher scores indicate more traditional ideologies.

The six items were standardized and summed, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .66. Although this value is modest, it is consistent with other work using these data (Greenstein, 2000; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000). The summated index was standardized to a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1.

Control variables. Husbands' age, wife's and husband's education (in years), and marital duration (in years) are included in the model as continuous variables. Substance abuse is included as a dummy variable. Respondents were asked, on the self-administered questionnaire, whether “anyone living here ha[s] a problem with alcohol or drugs.” This served as a screen for the next questions, asked of the 5% who responded affirmatively: “Who living here has a problem of drinking too much alcohol” and “Who living here has a problem with drug use.” Respondents were instructed to circle as many as applied from the following choices: me, spouse, child(ren), parent, someone else, no one. If the wife or the husband reported that the husband had a problem with alcohol, a dichotomous variable was coded 1 for the presence of the problem and 0 otherwise. Similarly, a dichotomous variable was constructed for husband's drug use problem. We include dummy variables for husband's race (Black or Hispanic, with non-Black, non-Hispanic as the baseline category).

Region of residence is coded using the Census Bureau's four regions (Northeast, North Central, South, and West; *West* is the baseline category). We included a crude measure of community size by including a dummy variable that indicated whether the couple lived in a standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA) at the time of the interview.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum values for all the variables in the models. A total of 4.2% of the couples reported that the husband has physically abused the wife (see Table 1). Although the national incidence of wives abused is probably higher than this (see Brush, 1990, for a discussion of underreporting in this sample), it is about what we expect for this sample (Szinovacz & Egley, 1995).

Descriptive Statistics

Husbands' and wives' income are comparable to national estimates in 1987–1988 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989). Husbands' earnings average about 64% of total couple earnings. All descriptive statistics are included in Table 1.

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR VARIABLES IN ALL ANALYSES ($N = 4,296$)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Wife is victim of abuse	.04	.20	0–1
Husband's education (years)	12.77	3.18	0–20
Wife's education (years)	12.62	2.70	0–20
Age of husband (years)	45.86	15.32	17–90
Age of wife (years)	43.14	14.92	16–90
Husband Black?	.06	.24	0–1
Husband Hispanic?	.06	.24	0–1
Husband's earnings (\$1,000)	28.17	40.31	0–800
Wife's earnings (\$1,000)	9.70	23.84	0–960
Marital duration (in years)	22.39	15.01	.08–68.91
Number of children	1.06	1.25	0–11
In standard metropolitan statistical area?	.74	.44	0–1
In Northeast region?	.17	.38	0–1
In South region?	.36	.48	0–1
In North Central region?	.29	.45	0–1
In West region?	.18	.39	0–1
Husband has drinking problem	.05	.22	0–1
Husband has drug problem	.01	.10	0–1
Husband's traditionalism	0	1	–3.03–3.42
Husband's relative earnings	.64	.36	0–1

Analytic Strategy

Because the dependent variable is a dichotomy (1 = *reported abuse* and 0 = *no report of abuse*), we use logistic regression to estimate five models. All these models include measures of number of children, marital duration, region of residence, and community size; none of these effects are statistically significant in any of the models and are therefore not reported in Table 2.

We begin by discussing the effects of the control variables (because the effects are consistent across the five models, we specifically consider the effects in Model 5 from Table 2). Five of the control variables have statistically significant effects on the likelihood of wife abuse. For each of these variables, we consider the multiplicative effects on the odds of wife abuse (given by e^{β} , where β is the logistic regression coefficient reported in Table 1—the effect on the log odds of wife abuse). Husband's education is negatively associated with likelihood of wife abuse. The model predicts that, for each year of education completed by the husband, the likelihood of the wife being abused declines by about 9%. Age of the husband is also negatively associated with wife abuse. The model predicts that, for each year of husband's age, the likelihood of abuse declines by about 8%.

Husbands who are Black are predicted to be about 82% more likely to abuse their wives than non-Black, non-Hispanic husbands. Finally, husbands who are reported to have an alcohol or drug abuse problem are far more likely to be perpetrators of wife abuse. Husbands with an alcohol abuse problem are almost four times as likely to abuse their wives as husbands who do not have an alcohol problem, and husbands with a drug problem are almost five times as likely to abuse their wives as husbands who do not have a drug abuse problem.

Model 1

In Model 1, we predict the likelihood of abuse from a set of control variables (husband's and wife's education, husband's race, husband's age, whether the husband has an alcohol or drug problem, marital duration, region of residence, number of children, residing in SMSA) and husband's earnings (our indicator of husband's resources). Thus, this model affords a test of resource theory in the form of the coefficient for husband's earnings. As a test of the resource model, Model 1 finds that husband's earnings do not have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of abuse.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSES PREDICTING LIKELIHOOD OF WIFE ABUSE (N = 4,296)

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	β	e^β	β	e^β	β	e^β	β	e^β	β	e^β
Husband's education (years)	-.11 ^a (.04)	.89	-.11 ^a (.04)	.90	-.11 ^a (.04)	.89	-.11 ^a (.04)	.90	-.10 ^a (.04)	.90
Wife's education (years)	.00 (.04)	1.00	-.01 (.04)	.99	.00 (.04)	1.00	.00 (.04)	1.00	.00 (.04)	1.00
Age of husband (years)	-.05 ^a (.02)	.95	-.06 ^a (.02)	.94	-.05 ^a (.02)	.95	-.06 ^a (.02)	.94	-.06 ^a (.02)	.94
Husband Black?	.59 ^a (.26)	1.80	.55 ^a (.26)	1.74	.59 ^a (.26)	1.80	.56 ^a (.26)	1.75	.56 ^a (.26)	1.74
Husband Hispanic?	-.14 (.32)	.87	-.13 (.32)	.88	-.14 (.32)	.87	-.13 (.32)	.88	-.09 (.32)	.91
Husband has drug problem	1.61 ^a (.38)	5.01	1.55 ^a (.38)	4.72	1.61 ^a (.38)	5.01	1.55 ^a (.38)	4.70	1.53 ^a (.39)	4.63
Husband has drinking problem	1.32 ^a (.25)	3.75	1.31 ^a (.25)	3.70	1.32 ^a (.25)	3.76	1.31 ^a (.25)	3.72	1.33 ^a (.25)	3.78
Husband's earnings (\$1,000)	-.00 (.00)	1.00	-.00 (.00)	1.00	-.00 (.00)	1.00	-.00 (.00)	1.00	-.00 (.00)	1.00
Husband's relative earnings		.55	-.59 ^a (.28)					.54	-.57 ^a (.29)	.57
Husband's traditionalism						1.00			.03 (.08)	1.04
Relative Earnings \times Traditionalism interaction						.00 (.08)			-.61 ^a (.29)	1.04
Constant	.33 (.67)		.85 (.71)		.32 (.67)		.85 (.71)		.75 (.71)	
-2 log likelihood	1273.41		1269.16		1273.41		1268.99		1263.26	
χ^2	222.43 ^a		226.69 ^a		222.43 ^a		226.85 ^a		232.58 ^a	
df	14		15		15		16		17	

Note: Table controls are region (Northeast, North Central, South), marital duration, number of children, and residing in standard metropolitan statistical area (omitted from table). e^β = exponentiated β (effects on the odds). Values in parentheses are standard errors of β . ^aCoefficient is at least twice its standard error ($p < .05$).

Model 2

In Model 2, we add a measure of husband's relative resources—husband's earnings relative to total couple earnings—to the control variables and measures of education from Model 1. The effects noted in Model 1 are essentially unchanged. This model provides a test of the relative resources theory. Husband's relative earnings have a statistically significant negative effect ($-.59$) on the likelihood of wife abuse; husbands who earn all of the couple's income are predicted to be about half as likely to abuse their wives as those who have no earnings.

Model 3

In Model 3, we add a measure of gender ideology—husband's traditionalism—to the variables in Model 1. The effects of the control variables are essentially unchanged, and husband's traditionalism does not have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of wife abuse.

Model 4

Model 4 includes measures of husband's relative resources and of husband's ideology; this model represents the *main effects* model to which the *interaction* model (Model 5) may be compared. Given that husband's relative earnings has a statistically significant effect on likelihood of wife abuse, it is reasonable to ask whether this effect remains when husband's gender ideology is taken into account. The coefficient for husband's relative earnings in Model 4 ($-.61$) remains statistically significant and of approximately the same magnitude as the corresponding estimate from Model 3.

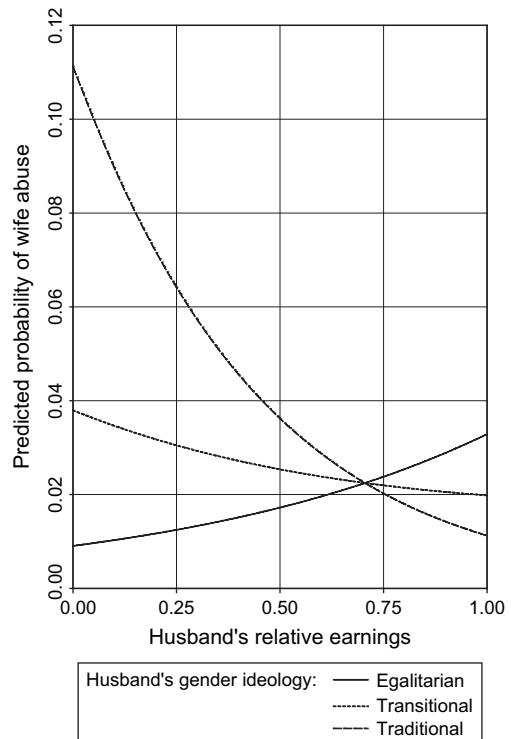
Model 5

Finally, Model 5 includes all the terms present in Model 4 but adds a product-term interaction between husband's relative resources and husband's gender ideology. Model 5 allows us to test the prediction of our gendered resource theory. Wife's income is not included in any of these models because of the linear dependency created by the presence of husband's earnings and husband's relative earnings in the model. The interaction between husband's relative resources and husband's gender ideology ($-.64$) is statistically significant. Although neither the effect of husbands' relative earnings nor the

effect of husbands' traditionalism can be readily interpreted in the presence of the statistically significant interaction, the pattern of the interaction can be easily visualized by examining Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities of wife abuse by husband's relative earnings for three hypothetical husbands: one holding relatively traditional gender beliefs (calculated as the midpoint of the upper third of husbands' scores on the traditionalism index), another holding moderate or transitional beliefs (the midpoint of the middle third), and a third holding relatively egalitarian or nontraditional ideologies (the midpoint of the lower third on the index). We then generated predicted probabilities by solving the logistic regression equation from Model 5 for each of these three points along the traditionalism scale and across the full possible range of husband's relative income (i.e., from 0 to 1) and converting the predicted

FIGURE 1. PREDICTED PROBABILITIES OF WIFE ABUSE BY HUSBAND'S RELATIVE EARNINGS FOR THREE GROUPS OF HYPOTHETICAL HUSBANDS DIFFERING IN TRADITIONALISM



effect on the log odds into a predicted probability ($1/1 + e^{-\beta x}$). The line marked *Traditional*, for example, represents the predicted probabilities of wife abuse for husbands whose traditionalism scores are at the midpoint of the upper third of the traditionalism scores and whose relative earnings vary over the full potential range (from 0 to 1) in the calculations.

There are only weak relationships between husband's relative earnings for the moderate and egalitarian groups; for moderate husbands, there is a weak negative effect, whereas for egalitarian husbands, there is a weak positive effect. For husbands holding the most traditional gender ideologies, however, there is a very strong negative effect of husband's relative earnings on probability of wife abuse. Wives who have relatively traditional husbands with no earnings are predicted to have about a .11 probability of being abused (recall that the sample average probability of being abused was about .04), whereas wives with traditional husbands who are the sole breadwinner—that is, wives with no earnings—are predicted to have only about a .01 probability of being abused. To summarize this effect, husband's relative earnings do not seem to have much effect on likelihood of wife abuse in marriages where the husband has an egalitarian or a transitional gender ideology, but there is a strong negative effect of husband's relative earnings for traditional husbands.

Further Analyses

We examined and substantially eliminated other potential explanations for our findings. For example, wives' gender ideologies might affect the likelihood of their being abused, especially if their ideology was much less traditional than their husband's. To test this potential explanation, we estimated additional models (not reported here but available from the authors) that included measures of the wife's gender ideology and the interaction of wife's and husband's ideologies. There was no effect of wife's gender ideology on the likelihood of being abused, nor was there a statistically significant interaction between wife's and husband's ideologies. We also tested nonlinear models that included second-order effects of relative income; in none of these models was the second-order (squared) effect of relative income statistically significant.

One possible alternative explanation for our findings is that our analysis might be unduly influenced by the relatively large numbers of wives with zero earnings. Similarly, it might be argued that the presence of husbands who have little or no income might bias the analysis. To study these issues, we conducted separate analyses (not reported here) on a subsample of our data that included only the middle 50% of relative earnings (couples where either spouse earned less than 25% of total couple earnings were omitted). The findings for this subsample are substantially similar to the overall findings reported in Table 2, thus suggesting that the inclusion of cases at the extremes of the relative earnings continuum did not substantially affect the outcome of the analyses.

DISCUSSION

This research provides a test of three different models of wife abuse. The first model—resource theory—suggests that husbands' absolute level of resources should be negatively associated with the likelihood of wife abuse. The second model—relative resource theory—emphasizes the effect of relative level of husband's resources on the likelihood of wife abuse. The third model—gendered resource theory—suggests that the effects of husband's relative resources are moderated by the husband's gender ideology. Hence, findings that husband's relative resources are negatively associated with the likelihood of wife abuse for traditional husbands but not necessarily associated for transitional or egalitarian husbands support the gendered resource theory.

Resource theory is not supported by our findings. Controlling for other factors in the model, low-income husbands in the sample are no more nor less likely to abuse their wives than are high-income husbands. Further, our findings provide only limited support for relative resource theory. Although husband's relative earnings are negatively and significantly related to the likelihood of abuse, this is the case primarily when men are traditional in their attitudes toward women's employment. When husbands hold egalitarian gender ideologies, relative resources have little effect on the likelihood of abuse. Thus, gendered resource theory receives strong support. The effect of relative resources seems to be moderated by husband's gender ideology.

On the one hand, we predicted that when men accept an ideology that defines masculinity in relationship to being the breadwinner, and their wives earn a significant portion of couple income, violence might be used to reassert dominance. When the familial arena does not provide husbands with the expected opportunity to validate gender ideologies (Greenstein, 1996b), violence may be used as an alternative resource to income production (Jasinski, 2001). On the other hand, when men believe that both spouses are responsible for income production, wives' earnings do not constitute a threat to masculine gender ideology and violence would not be perceived as a needed alternative resource. When their husbands hold traditional gender ideologies, wives' proportion of couple income has a very strong effect on the likelihood of wife abuse. When men are egalitarian, wives' proportion of couple income has little if any effect on the odds of abuse.

Structural explanations of wife abuse such as resource and relative resource theories emphasize violence as compensation for husbands' shortage of resources. These theories have received wide support, but they ignore cultural variables and take for granted that married men *want* to be breadwinners, particularly in comparison to their wives. In other words, rather than accurately reflecting the variability in men's gender ideologies, such arguments assume all men to be traditional. Gender theorists suggest that domestic violence provides a mechanism by which men construct masculinities (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Yllö, 1993). Our results contribute to this literature by specifying the structural and cultural conditions under which masculinities are likely to be constructed through the use of violence against a wife.

Limitations of the Current Research

The current research is consistent with previous research using the NSFH (Brush, 1990) in that the overall level of reported violent acts is lower here than in many previous surveys. In addition, the data suffer from all the limitations typically associated with the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). These questions deal only with physical violence and omit references to sexual violence or other measures of coercive control. On the one hand, like other large surveys, the NSFH is more likely to have captured less

severe and more symmetrical violence than shelter or clinical samples (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). On the other hand, the NSFH is an important source of data on wife abuse in that it contains couple data. The use of couple data is an important consideration in the study of wife abuse (Szinovacz & Egley, 1995). Theoretically, it is also vital that our data include information on income earned by both husband and wife as does the NSFH.

Another limitation is presented by our operationalization of race, which is a crude measure of race/ethnicity. Hispanics, for example, could include such diverse groups as Cubans, Puerto Ricans, or Mexicans. The category *White* potentially includes enough ethnic variation to be relatively meaningless. This is especially problematic in a study such as ours that focuses on gender ideology. Staying home to care for children may be more or less relevant across ethnicities.

Conclusions

These findings join a growing body of literature that suggests that the antecedents, consequences, and interpretation of family processes are contingent upon gender ideology. Whether the process is marrying (Hyde & Greenstein, 1997), effects of age at marriage on marital stability (Davis & Greenstein, 2004), the possibility of being the victim of spousal abuse (Jones, 1999), perceptions of fairness within the marriage (Greenstein, 1996a), or effects of wives' employment on marital stability (Sayer & Bianchi, 2000), researchers have suggested that family processes differ as a result of one's gender ideology.

Our research offers both empirical evidence and a theoretical explanation for wife abuse as compensatory masculinity by providing an example of the intersection of social structure and culture creating a context under which wife abuse is a more or less likely event. The results of this study support a perspective that views wife abuse within a framework of gender inequality and sees gender as a social construction. Both Segal (1990) and Yllö (1993) point out that most men do not abuse and that it is important to understand and predict which men will abuse rather than assuming that all men are potentially violent (cf. Dobash & Dobash, 1998). This research illustrates the importance of conceptualizing masculinity as a variable

rather than as a constant (Umberson, Anderson, Williams, & Chen, 2003).

Family life provides opportunity contexts within which men and women may potentially validate their gender identities. When husbands believe that providership is the key component of masculinity and they are able to validate that belief by being the primary economic provider, wife abuse is likely to be a rare event. When men equate masculinity and providership and are not the primary breadwinner, however, their familial role does not allow them to reinforce their masculine identity. Under these conditions, men are much more likely to use violence to compensate for their lack of income. Husbands' gender ideology creates vastly different contexts within which economic providership is experienced and changes the meaning and impact of husbands' and wives' relative resources. In the future, wives' greater income production should be less of a threat to their husbands as the separate spheres ideology continues to weaken. In the meantime, however, these women remain at a greater risk for abuse.

Often, studies of family processes focus on either cultural or structural explanations at the expense of the other. Our research findings suggest that structural constraints and opportunities are conditioned by ideational or cultural forces. Future research will be richer theoretically and more fruitful empirically if we take seriously the intersection of structure and culture. Marriage must be studied as a structural context within which we create our gendered selves. We are more likely to understand our most intimate patterns of behavior when our research and theory considers our beliefs about the content of these socially constructed selves.

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