

# GENDER HOSTILITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST DATING PARTNERS <sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Numerous studies, including the present study, have found that physical aggression against a partner in a dating relationship is experienced by about 35% of couples in the U.S.A. This high level of physical aggression in couple relationships is a serious social and psychological problem and an important theoretical issue. We need to understand why love is so often combined with physical aggression. This research is based on the theory that culturally institutionalized hostility between men and women is part of the explanation. We tested the hypotheses that the higher the level of hostility to the opposite sex, the greater the rate of physical assault of a partner in a dating, cohabiting, or marital relationship, and that this relationship is strongest among men. The hypotheses were tested on a sample of 218 university students. Scales to measure hostility of men to women and hostility of women to men were developed. Physical aggression against a partner was measured by the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2). The Gender Hostility scale revealed a very high level of hostility of men to women and of women to men, which is consistent with the assumption of a culturally institutionalized pattern. Partial correlation and analysis of covariance found that scores of women on the hostility to men scale related to assault against a male partner. However, the hypothesized relation was not found for men. Supplemental analyses suggested that the relationship between hostility to men and physical assaults by women is partly due to confounding of gender hostility with anger as a personality characteristic.

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Key words: Misanthropy, gender, hostility, violence, dating, aggression

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	1
THE CONCEPT OF GENDER HOSTILITY .....	2
METHODS .....	3
Sample .....	3
Questionnaire Administration .....	3
Measurement of Gender Hostility .....	3
Previous Measures .....	3
The Gender Hostility (GH) Scales .....	4
Reliability .....	4
Short Forms .....	4

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Measure Of Assault .....	5
SES Measure .....	5
FINDINGS .....	5
Extent of Gender Hostility .....	5
Gender Hostility and Partner Assault .....	6
Stereotypical Thinking and Partner Assault .....	6
Generalized Anger and Partner Assault .....	7
DISCUSSION .....	7
REFERENCES .....	8
TABLES AND FIGURES .....	9

One of the great puzzles of human social behavior is why a typical citizen is at the greatest risk of being physically assaulted by a member of their own family or other intimate relationships.

In fact, we have argued that the more intimate the relationship, the greater the risk of being assaulted (Straus, 1987; Straus & Gelles, 1990). There are many possible reasons for this paradox, starting with things as simple as the greater amount of time spent with intimates (see Straus & Hotaling, 1980 for a theoretical analysis). Theoretical and case study analyses of violence against partners in dating, cohabiting and marital relationships give considerable attention to hostility towards members of the opposite sex (??, 19??). However, although there has been empirical research on many of the presumed risk factors for partner violence (summarized in Gelles & Straus, 1988; Straus & Gelles, 1990), gender hostility is a surprising omission from the empirical literature on physical aggression against a partner. It seems as though the "battle of the sexes" is familiar to everyone except empirical researchers. This paper is intended to help fill that gap. We also hope to contributed to further research on gender hostility by providing information on a new measure of gender hostility.

### THE CONCEPT OF GENDER HOSTILITY

James Thurber's cartoons depicting the "battle of the sexes" are one of many manifestations of the hostility between men and women as social categories that permeate American culture. The extent to which negative feelings and stereotypes continue can be seen from some of the statistics from the paper describing the development of the Gender Hostility scales used for the research to be reported in this paper (Yodanis & Straus, 1996).

Twenty seven percent of the male university students studied by Yodanis and Straus said that women are more dishonest than men, 45% said that women are too demanding, 75% said that they did not trust women as much as men, 42% believed that women always want to be right, 53% felt that women don't understand men, 23% said they felt resentful of women, 44% said they were easily frustrated by women, 72% said that women do not give men credit for their achievements, 8% believed that men are smarter than women and 54% believed that women manipulate me.

Of course, as in Thurber's cartoons, men are not the only protagonists in the battle of the sexes. Thirty percent of the women in this sample of university students believed that men are more dishonest than women, 22% said that men are too demanding, 71% believed that men always want to be right, 67% felt that men don't understand women, 24% said they felt resentful of men, 43% said they were easily frustrated by men, 52% said that women do not give men credit for their achievements, 25% believed that women are smarter than men, and 39% believed that men manipulate women.

The concept of gender hostility is also at the intersection of several social science traditions. It figures importantly in feminist theory, and specifically hostility of men to women (19??). Gendered experiences and socially ascribed differences between men and women in power and privilege are also a primary focus of conflict theory (Collins & Coltrane, 1991) and theories of stratification theory (Hartmann, 1976; England, 1986). Gender hostility has been a focus in research on rape. For example, Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, and DeLuca (1992) found that hostility toward women is related to tolerance of sexual harassment. Malamuth (1986) found that hostility to women is related to sexual aggression toward women. Dewhurst, Moore, and Alfano (1992) found that hostility to women is one of the best discriminators between male sexual offenders and batterers and nonabusive men. Similarly, Scott, Owens, and Stecker (1993) found that for men, but not for women, hostility toward the opposite sex, is related to sexual pressure and manipulation.

Given the attention to gender hostility in psychological, sociological, and feminist analysis, and given the relationship between gender hostility and sexual aggression, we hypothesized that the higher the level of hostility toward the opposite sex, the greater the probability of physical assault towards a partner of that sex. We further hypothesized that this relationship would be strongest for men.

## METHODS

### Sample

These hypotheses were tested using data from questionnaires completed by 232 undergraduate students in introductory sociology courses. Of these, 218 (79 men and 139 women) were or had been in a heterosexual relationship of at least one month duration during the past year and were therefore included in the analysis. Almost all (92.8%) were dating rather than engaged or married. Three-fourths were sexually active in their current or past relationships. The median age was 20 and they were representatives from all years at the university. The sample is ethnically and racially homogeneous: 93% white, and mainly of high socioeconomic status; 25% of fathers and 17% of mothers were college graduates; 27% reported family income to be \$80,000 or more; and 2% were members of fraternities or sororities.

Questionnaire Administration. The data was obtained using a self-administered anonymous questionnaire completed in class. The respondents were told that the questionnaire was about the strengths and weakness of people's relationships, and that the questions included sexual content. They were also informed that, if they did not wish to participate they could just put the blank questionnaire in the box provided, and that, although we hoped they would try to answer all questions, they were free to skip questions.

## Measurement of Gender Hostility

Previous Measures. Our search of the literature located three scales whose titles suggested that they measure gender hostility. Two of them -- the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale (Burt, 1980) and the Attitude Toward Women Scale (Spence and Helmreich (1972) -- are measures of negative attitudes about the relationships between men and women or attitudes about appropriate gender roles, but are not measures of hostility to men or hostility to women. The Hostility Toward Men and Hostility Toward Women Scales (Check & Malamuth 1983) seem to be the only scales which measure hostility per se, and they have the advantage of being parallel scales for hostility to men and women. Parallel scales are needed to compare the degree to which men and women are antagonistic to the other gender. Parallel scales can also play a critical role in research on the etiology of hostility toward the other gender. For example, the use of a Hostility Toward Men scale in addition to a Hostility toward Women scale enabled Check and Malamuth to show that fear of victimization is related to women's hostility to men.

Despite these strengths, Check and Malamuth's scales have some limitations. First, the items in the two scales, while often comparable, are not symmetrical. As a result of using different items for men and women, it is not possible to make accurate gender comparisons of the level of hostility. Second, some the items themselves appear to be faulty. For example, "I used to think that most men told the truth, but now I know otherwise" would be difficult to answer by someone who has always believed that men lie. The item "Men irritate women a great deal more than they know of" confuses whether men are believed to irritate women with whether men realize this. Third, Check and Malamuth's scales focus on beliefs about negative attributes about men and women and do not pay explicit attention to hostile emotions such as anger or resentment. Fourth, some of the items are reality based such as "Men always seem to get the breaks." One could agree with this and want to correct the inequalities, but not be hostile to men. Fifth, all the items are True-False choices restricting the range of measurement.

The Gender Hostility (GH) Scales. The limitations of previous scales described above led us to develop new measures of gender hostility. The development of the GH scales is described in detail elsewhere (Yodanis and Straus, 1996). The items are based on findings from the qualitative research of Reiser (1993) and our own qualitative study, our theoretical judgements, items from previous measures of gender hostility such as Check and Malamuth (1983), and from measures of hostility or prejudice toward other groups such as the Attitude Toward Homosexuality Scale (Larsen, Reed, and Hoffman, 1980), the Index of Homophobia (Hudson and Rickett, 1980), the Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1933), and the State-Trait Anger Scale (Spielberger and London, 1983),

We created an item pool consisting of 33 items for the Hostility to Men scale and 33 for the Hostility to Women scale. Both sets of 33 items consisted of 9 intended to measure negative emotions such as irritation and anger, and 24 intended to measure negative beliefs such as women exploit men or men exploit women. Some items were worded so that an "agree" response meant hostility, and some so that an "disagree" response meant hostility. Items for which a response of Disagree indicated hostility were reversed prior to scoring. The score for each scale or subscale consists of the sum of the 1 to 4 code values.

Reliability. Alpha coefficients were computed using the Reliability program in SPSS/PC. The item-total correlations from the reliability analysis identified two items with very low or negative

correlations. These were dropped to create the 31-item version of the scales (Yodanis and Straus, 1996). The alpha coefficients are .88 for the Hostility to Men (GHM) scale and .92 for the Hostility To Women (GHW) scale.

Short Forms. Many studies can devote only a limited amount of interview or questionnaire time to measuring gender hostility. We therefore developed a five-item and a ten-item short form. Data from male respondents was used to select items for the short form GHW scale and data from female respondents for the short form GHM scale. The five items most highly correlated with the total score constitute the five-item scales, and the 10 most highly correlated items constitute the ten-item short forms. The alpha coefficients for the short forms are, of course lower than those of the full scale, but not by much: .72 for the GHM5 scale and .85 for GHW5. For the ten-item short forms, the alpha's are .81 for GHM10 scale and .90 for the GHW10 scale.

A limitation of the short forms is that they do not provide separate subscales for negative emotions and negative beliefs. Nevertheless, the short forms are highly correlated with the full length scales: .90 with the full scale for the the five and .94 for the ten-item GHM short forms, and .90 with the full scale for the five-item and .93 with ten-item GHW short forms. We also carried out preliminary analysis to examine the correlation between the GH scales and assault. The results using the full length, the five-item, and the ten-item forms were very similar. Given the equivalent correlations, we decided to use the five-item short form for this paper because our experience suggests that other investigators will find the brevity of a five item scale to be a advantageous. The items in these scales and the percent of men agreeing or strongly agreeing with each GHW item and the percent of women agreeing or strongly agreeing with each GHM item are given in Table 1.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

### Measure Of Violence

In addition to the GH scale items, the questionnaire included the revised Conflict Tactics Scales or CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, McCoy, & Sugarman 1996). The CTS is a widely used instrument, with evidence of validity and reliability from many investigations (summarized in Straus, 1990). The CTS asks respondents to report how often in the past year they and their partners used certain tactics to handle anger and conflict in their dating, cohabiting, or marriage relationship. The Physical Assault scale of the CTS2 is the measure of partner violence used for this paper. The items range from minor assaults such as slapping and shoving, to felony level assaults such as an attack with a knife or gun. The partner assault rate for this sample -- 34% is typical of numerous previous studies (see tabular summary in Sugarman & Hotelling, 1989). Most of these were minor assaults such as slapping or throwing things, but 13% of these students reported engaging in a severe assault (in the sense of a high risk of injury) such as attacking with an object or punching the partner.

### SES Measure

Socioeconomic (SES) status might be confounded with the gender hostility and partner assault. Consequently, all analyses controlled for SES using an index consisting of the number of years education completed by the respondent's mother and father, and the family income of the parents. This three item scale has an Alpha of .66.

## FINDINGS

### Extent of Gender Hostility

The theoretical range of the five-item scales (Gender Hostility To Men or GHM5, and Gender Hostility To Women or GHW5) is from 5 (all items answered "Strongly Disagree") to 20 (all items answered "Strongly Agree"). For the 79 men who answered all five questions, the mean GHW5 score is 10.9. For the 139 women who answered all five questions, the mean GHM5 score is 11.0. These results and the fact that the distribution of scores in Table 2 is not skewed to the low end, suggest that there is a great deal of hostility toward women by men and towards men by women.

Another indication of the level of gender hostility in this sample of university students is given by the percentages who agreed or strongly agreed with each item. Table 1 shows that at least a fifth of this sample of university students agreed with each of the five items, and for most of them, the proportion agreeing was greater. Earlier, in the introduction we reported percentages for some of the items that are not in the short form. Finally, we computed the number of items with which each respondent agreed or strongly agreed. For GHW5, 58.2% of the men agree with at least one of the men agreed with at least one of the five statements hostile to women as a social category, and an almost identical proportion of women (59%) endorsed at least one of the hostility to men items. Using the full length 31 item scales, all of the 79 men, and all but one of the 139 women endorsed at least one of the items expressing hostility to the opposite sex. The median number of items endorsed was 9 for men and 10 for women (out of a possible 31).

(Insert Table 2 about here)

### Gender Hostility and Partner Assault

The high level of hostility towards the opposite sex as social categories might be part of the reason for the high level of physical assault that occurs in couple relationships. Perhaps the substantial part of the population that harbors hostile beliefs and feelings about the opposite sex is also responsible for a substantial part of the violence against partners.

To test this hypothesis, we first computed partial correlations between the gender hostility (GH) scales and the Physical Assault scale of the CTS (controlling for SES). Separate analyses were performed for male and female respondents because the theory concerns hostility to members of the opposite sex. We used three different versions of each GH scale (full length, ten-item, and five-item). To our surprise, we found no correlation between gender hostility by men and assault against a partner. However, the hypothesized relationship between hostility to men and assaulting a male partner was supported for women. The results were very similar for all three versions of the GH scales. The partial correlation between GHW5 and assault (controlling for SES) was .04 for the male respondents using the full GHW scale, .03 using the ten-item short form, and .02 using the five-item short form. For women, the correlations with assaults on a male partner, controlling for SES, was .25 using the full GHM scale, .22 using the ten-item version, and .26 using the five-item version (all significant at  $p > .01$ , one tailed tests).

Thinking that the near zero correlation between hostility to women and violence against women partners might be due to a non-linear relationship, we transformed the GH scale scores into quintiles (to have enough cases in each category) and performed analyses of covariance (controlling for SES, age, length of relationship, and whether there was sexual intercourse) and plotted the means. For male respondents, there were only small and non-significant differences in violence

between GHW quintiles, and there was no discernable pattern. For female respondents, however, we found large differences, as shown in Figure 1.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

### Stereotypical Thinking and Partner Assault

The theoretical focus of the research initially led us to analyze only the results relating hostility to the opposite sex to violence against a partner of the opposite sex. However, the lack of support for the hypothesis among men, the group for which we expected the strongest relationship, led us to explore other combinations of variables. Surprisingly, we found that GH scores for the opposite sex were only slightly higher than the scores for hostility to the respondents own sex. For men, the mean GHW5 score was 10.9 and the mean GHM5 score 10.7. For women, the mean GHM5 score was 10.9 and the mean GHW5 score 10.0.

The similarity in scores for hostility to the same and the opposite sex suggests that the high scoring subjects are people who think in stereotypical terms, and that they apply this to all categories of persons, men as well as women. It could be that a high level of stereotypical thinking interferes with managing interpersonal relationships, and this is what accounts for the relationship between GH and violence. However, that reasoning should apply to both men and women. Moreover, if GH scores represent the more general trait of stereotypical thinking, rather than negative stereotypes about a specific sex, the correlation of the GH scales with assault should be as high for hostility to the respondents own sex as for hostility to the opposite sex. For men, we did find similar correlations, but only because all were near-zero. For women, the correlations of assault with GH to men was significant, whereas the correlation of hostility to their own sex was not significant. Consequently, the puzzle of no relationship between gender hostility and violence among male respondents remains unsolved by the idea that the GH scores are more indicative of stereotyped thinking than of hostility to a specific sex.

### Generalized Anger and Partner Assault

The available data permitted us to explore one other possible explanation for the findings. Perhaps the GH scales really measure anger as a personality trait rather than anger or hostility to a specific sex. Our more general interest in theories of aggression led us to include a generalized anger, or anger trait scale in the questionnaire. The referent in the items for this eight-item scale is "people" rather than "men" or "women." The items are: I am sometimes suspicious of people, There are days when I don't like anyone, People care only about themselves, People irritate me a lot, I am easily frustrated by people, People are rude, People are too competitive, and I often feel resentful of people. The alpha coefficient of reliability for this sample is .79.

For male respondents, the correlation of the Anger Scale with the GHW5 scale is .68; and for female respondents the correlation of the Anger Scale with the GHM5 scale is .66. Thus, there is substantial overlap between gender hostility and general hostility. However, even a correlation of .68 means that 46% of the variance in these two variables is not explained by the other. Consequently, it is possible to examine the independent effect of gender hostility by computing the partial correlation of the GH scale with assault, controlling for Anger. For men, this procedure



resulted in an increase in the correlation between the GHW5 score and assault to .13, but given the sample size, this is not significant. For women, controlling for anger reduced the correlation to zero. Thus, general anger, of which anger at men is only a part, may contribute to correlation between the GHM scale and physical assault against a partner by women.

## DISCUSSION

This study of hostility to women by men and hostility to men by women found that all but one of the 218 university student participants agreed or strongly agreed with at least one of the 31 Gender Hostility (GH) scale items. Moreover, both men and women respondents endorsed a median of about ten of the 31 GH items. Thus, the typical student in this sample agreed with almost a third of the items hostile to the opposite sex. This suggests that there is a very high level of hostility to women by men, and an equally high level hostility to men by women.

Turning to the measure of physical assault, our findings are consistent with other studies of college students in showing extremely rates of assault by both male and female students against dating, cohabiting, or marital partners by both male and female students(34%).

Although there was a broad distribution of both the independent and dependent variables, tests of the hypothesis that gender hostility is associated with the physical assault of a partner were supported only for assaults by women, whereas we had expected the relationship to be stronger for men. Lack of a similar and even stronger relationship between hostility to women and assaults by men is puzzling. Perhaps the hypothesis was not supported for men because of a sampling error that occurred as result of the relatively small sample (79 men). The lack of a relationship might also be due to measurement error that affects men more than women. There has been almost two decades of feminist effort to aid battered women and condemn violence against women. As a result men be less forthcoming about their hostile beliefs and feelings and aggressive behavior toward women. However, if that were the case, men should have reported substantially lower GH scale scores, and lower assault scale scores, but they did not.

Further analyses using a scale to measure anger in general suggests that the association between scores on Gender Hostility to Men and assaults on male partners, might be largely a reflection of anger as a personality trait and stereotypical thinking. Consequently, it might be better to reconceptualize the Gender Hostility scales and consider them to be measures of gender stereotypes. As in the case of negative stereotypes about racial/ethnic groups, even if these stereotypes do not necessarily mean hostility, they are likely to create difficulties in managing interpersonal relations with members of the stereotyped group, and this can increase the probability of hostile and violent acts.

Sometimes the most obvious truths turn out not to be false, or only half truths. Ironically that is often when science can make its greatest contribution. One thinks of such obvious "facts" as the sun revolving around the earth, or the obvious, but also incorrect "fact" that the destruction of German cities in the second world war also destroyed civilian morale. Both of these failed hypotheses led to important advances in understanding the nature of the universe and the nature of human society. The findings of this paper support the idea that hostility by men to women and women to men is widely prevalent in American society. However, they do not support the seemingly "obvious fact" that hostility of men to women is an important part of the explanation for the high level

of physical assault in dating, cohabiting, and marital relationship. At this point we can only hope that these puzzling findings will encourage other scholars to further pursue the issue. When an answer is found, it could make an important contribution to theories of aggression and to human well being.

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#### TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Percent agreeing with Items in five-item short forms of the Gender Hostility Scales \*

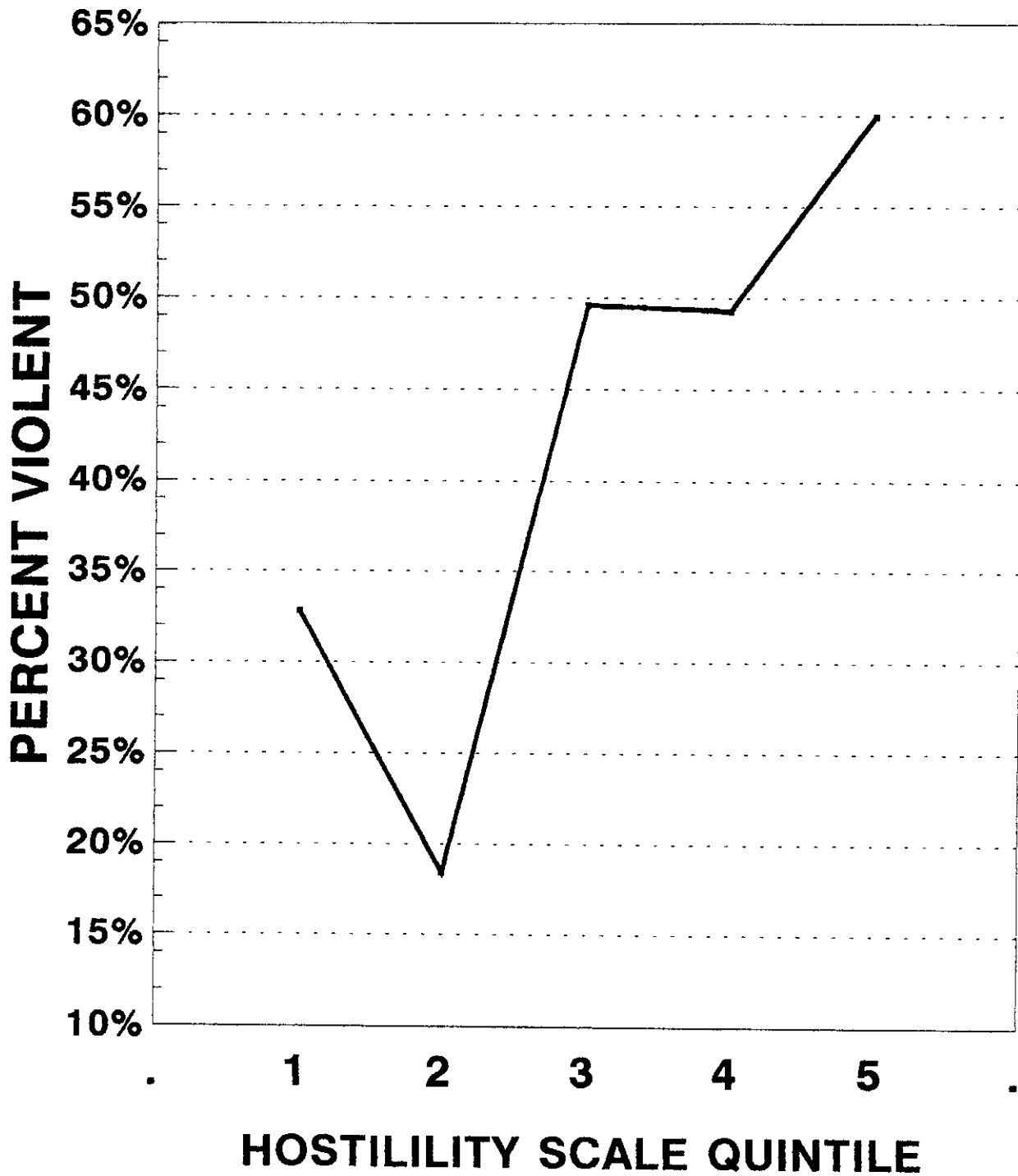
Gender Hostility To Women (GHW5) %		Gender Hostility To Men (GHW5) %	
Women are rude	19.5	Men are rude	26.7
Women treat men badly	29.4	Men treat women badly	23.5
Women irritate me a lot	18.2	Men irritate me a lot	21.6
I often feel resentful of women	23.0	Men are more dishonest than women	29.9
I am easily frustrated by women	43.6	Men respect women (reverse scored)	24.3

\* Percentages for GHW5 are based on 134 women; for GHW5 they are based on 76 men. The response categories are: 1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, 4. Strongly Agree

Table 2. Frequency Distribution for five-item short form Gender Hostility Scales \*

Score	% Distribution for:	
	GHW5 (N=139)	GHW5 (N=79)
5	1.4	0.8
6	4.1	1.6
7	5.5	0.8
8	6.8	7.0
9	4.1	4.7
10	26.0	30.5
11	17.8	21.9
12	12.3	15.6
13	8.2	7.0
14	1.4	3.1
15	6.8	3.1
15	2.7	2.3
17	1.4	—
18	—	0.8
19	1.4	0.8
Mean	10.9	11.0
SD	2.7	2.2

# VIOLENCE TOWARD MALE PARTNER BY HOSTILITY TO MEN SCALE



117 WOMEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. ANCOVA MEANS ADJUSTED FOR  
SES, AGE, LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP, SEX IN RELATIONSHIP

VRMI\P\VR5\VR5A

