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ABSTRACT
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Results from the study in progress, based on 78 pairs of children,
were consistent with the proposed model. (Author/RH)

Social Relationships of Physically Abused Preadolescent Urban School Children

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Abstract

A model of the effects of physical abuse on child peer social status was tested in an ongoing empirical study of 8- 12-year-old physically abused urban school children and matched control children selected from among their classmates. The model posited that family patterns of violent behavior both predict general behavioral disturbance in the children and provide models for the adoption of aggressive behavior in children. It further suggests that the aggressive behavior that the children exhibit to peers largely accounts for the abused children's lowered social status among peers. And finally it suggests that the generally high level of behavioral disturbance found in abused children has far reaching and pervasive effects on the children's functioning in areas over and above those having to do with their social status. The results of the study thus far, based on 78 pairs of children, were found to be consistent with the proposed model.

Social Relationships of Physically Abused Preadolescent Urban School Children

Considering the household as the primary setting in which early social behavior is learned, and parents as both the models and reinforcing agents for that behavior, one can construct working models for the kinds of social behavior children are likely to learn in their early years. Indeed, a number of researchers concerned with child rearing have done just that (Baumrind, Bell, Belsky, Brunquell, Burgess, Ciccetti, Egeland, Lewis, Patterson, and Wolfe). Among these, some have been interested in examining more global aspects of parental behavior and, correspondingly, relatively more global aspects of developmental outcome variables in the children, as, for example, Baumrind's work on family types, while others have been concerned with specific aspects of parent-child interaction and the development of specific behavioral outcomes in children, as, for example, Patterson's work on coercive behavior cycles. And all, as originally conceptualized by Bell, have viewed the parenting process as a transactive one. Generally speaking, in relatively healthy families, a wide range of socially acceptable behaviors is modeled and positively reinforced, and children interacting with their parents and siblings in these settings develop a correspondingly wide range of behavioral interactive styles. This behavior is then utilized in subsequent relationships with peers and others in the child's personal social network, thereby

mediating the child's social status with others. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1.   Overall Model

        Family socialization --> Child behavior --> Peer status

        The positive influence on children's behavior of non-deviant
households is predicated upon two conditions: that positive
affective relationships predominate between the parents and
children, and that the parents are reasonably competent. For the
vast majority of households, these conditions hold. But what
happens to the socialization of children in families where they
do not hold, and what happens subsequently to the childre s
developing social relationships with others?

        Research on abusive families helps inform us more generally
about parenting effects because it extends the range of
interactive family patterns that we can examine for their effects
on later child behavior. To be sure, as in non-deviant families,
there is no single type of abusive household, so one need not
expect that all abused children will be socialized in precisely
the same way. Even in abusive families there is a range of
characteristics that can be considered for their influence on the
child's developing social behavior. The one critical
characteristic that they all share -- the intentional hurt
inflicted by a parent on the child -- might well be expected to
have a pervasive rather than a specific effect on children's

emotional and behavioral development.

However, the severity with which this parental behavior occurs, and the structural and emotional family context in which it occurs, can be expected to modify the effect on the child's socialization such that more specific effects can be identified as well. We suggest that two major factors, taken in combination, be considered in order to predict more specific behavioral outcomes -- severity of abuse to the child and the pervasiveness of abuse within the family. Among the parameters which serve to define the severity of abuse to the child are (1) the age at which the child was first abused -- the younger the age, the greater the presumed impact; (2) the frequency and duration of the abuse -- single or isolated incidents counting for less than regular repeated occurrence; (3) the extent of bodily injury sustained by the child; and (4) the type of abuse -- traditional, albeit injurious, disciplinary physical abuse ("excessive corporal punishment") unaccompanied by verbal abuse being less severe than physical abuse accompanied by loud, angry, demeaning, and threatening language, such as insults and curses. Pervasiveness of abuse within the family can be defined by whether the child is targeted as the sole victim in the household or whether abuse is directed towards other members of the family as well. The more pervasive the abuse, the more such behavior can be interpreted and understood by the child as a normative mode of interaction. The less pervasive the abuse, the more the child may tend to feel victimized.
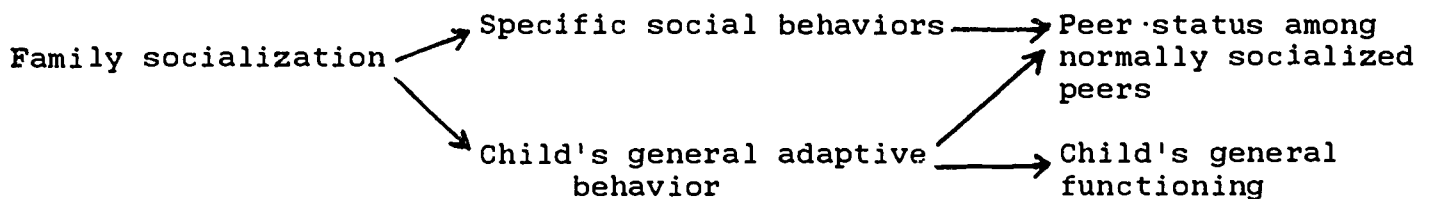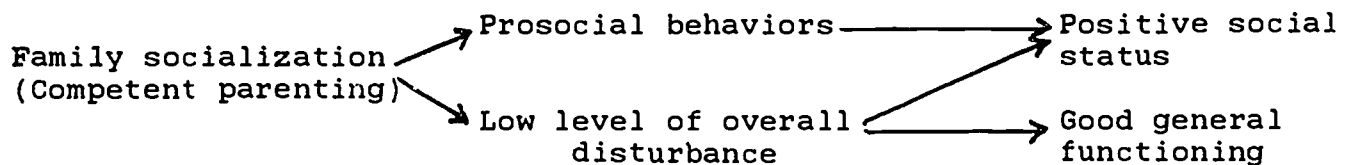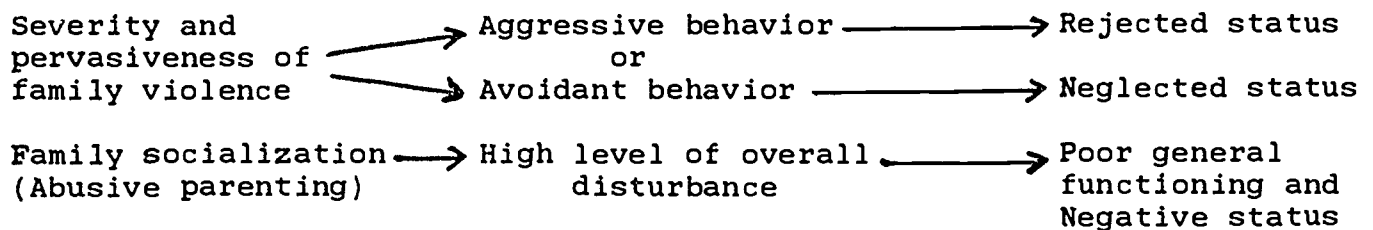
Combinations of these factors, i.e., severity and pervasiveness, can be hypothesized to give rise to two specific types of poor social outcome. The first is socially avoidant withdrawn behavior which is the result of early severe abuse directed primarily at the child alone. We believe that this behavior is characteristic of those children whose own early social interaction has been singled out and severely punished, whose behavior has been conditioned primarily by aversive contingencies, and for whom social interaction has become something to be feared and therefore avoided. At the other extreme is socially aggressive behavior which is learned within the context of widespread modeling of aggressive behavior in the household and in interactions comprised of coercive behavior cycles which are negatively reinforced for both parents and children. Insofar as the goals attained by such aggressive behavior function as reinforcing events for the child in spite of the pain suffered by being a victim of the same behavior, then such behavior might be expected to be adopted by the child as a major mode of interaction with others.

Let us next consider what happens to these children's social relationships when they move out of the home and into the neighborhood and school where they come increasingly into contact with other people, and particularly with other children. If they have in fact learned to behave in either of the two socially unacceptable ways we have described, then they run a decided risk of developing lower social status among their peers than do other

children. Negative social status takes two main forms, social neglect and social rejection. Social neglect has been associated with withdrawn and socially avoidant behavior, and social rejection with overly aggressive behavior.

Based upon the above discussion, the overall model we have proposed (See Figure 2) can now be more fully specified as follows:

Figure 2.   <u>More Fully Specified Model</u>

<u>General Model</u>

Family socialization → Specific social behaviors → Peer·status among normally socialized peers

Family socialization → Child's general adaptive behavior → Child's general functioning

<u>No Abuse</u>

Family socialization (Competent parenting) → Prosocial behaviors → Positive social status

Family socialization (Competent parenting) → Low level of overall disturbance → Good general functioning

<u>Abuse</u>

Severity and pervasiveness of family violence → Aggressive behavior → Rejected status
or
Severity and pervasiveness of family violence → Avoidant behavior → Neglected status

Family socialization (Abusive parenting) → High level of overall disturbance → Poor general functioning and Negative status

The data we are presenting today address a number of hypotheses suggested by this model.

The sample, thus far, consists of 78 confirmed cases of physically abused 8 - 12-year-old children selected from among consecutive cases entered into the the New York State Central Child Abuse Register for New York City. They are matched demographically case by case to a sample of 78 non-abused classmates, thus controlling for school, grade level and, usually, neighborhood of residence. The abuse sample is highly representative of the New York City Register in terms of race and ethnic composition -- 5% White, 56% Black, 38% Hispanic, and 1% Unclassified. The abuse and control samples are demographically well matched to each other on socioeconomic status (49% of the abuse sample and 42% of the control sample is on welfare); the mean age of the children in both samples is approximately 10 years; mothers' mean age is 36 and 37; mothers' education for both samples is less than the completion of high school, with a year more schooling for the control sample; the number of children in the home is 2.9 and 2.8. The sample includes 71% boys, a somewhat higher proportion than on the City Register, but analyses of the relationship of gender to the variables of interest in the study have all been statistically nonsignificant. We want to emphasize that since both samples are of comparable and severe economic disadvantage, a family stress factor which has been found to be related to abuse nationally (Straus), any differences we find between the children will be more readily attributable to the specific effects of maltreatment.

The results we are presenting today are derived from

information from interviews with parents, from standardized
parent and teacher ratings of children's behavior, from
classmates' nomination of children they like and dislike, and
from classmates' ratings of each other's behavior.

Family socialization was assessed on the basis of narrative
information from parents concerning the handling of disagreements
within the household and, for abuse families, supplemented by
agency narratives describing abusive incidents. Information was
coded for the frequency and severity of violent behavior among
adults and children, the age of the child when the violent
behavior occurred, the type of violent behavior, both physical
and verbal, and the victims and perpetrators of violence.
Severity of abuse to the child and the pervasiveness of abuse
within the family were based on combinations of the above
categories. Not surprisingly, on almost every index of family
violence, the abuse families scored significantly higher than the
controls (the grand mean of 18 indices = .30 for the abuse
families and .13 for the control families) (See Table 1).

The children's general adaptive behavior and overall
disturbance were measured by standardized Achenbach Parent and
Teacher Ratings of Total Behavior Problems, Externalizing
Problems, Internalizing Problems, and general Social Competence
and Adaptive Functioning, these latter two assessed respectively
by parents and teachers. On all but the measure of Social
Competence, the control children showed significantly less
disturbance than the abused children (See Table 2). It ought to

be noted, parenthetically, that both samples scored fairly high with respect to national norms, especially on externalizing problems.

The assessment of specific social behaviors was based on classmates' ratings of shyness, leadership, fighting, sharing and cooperation, saying mean things, and attention-getting, on a 5-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "a whole lot more than other kids." Control children were rated significantly higher on the prosocial behaviors of leadership and sharing, whereas the abused children were rated higher on the socially disapproved behaviors of fighting and meanness. No significant difference was found between the two groups on shyness (very few children in either sample were rated as shy at all), although attention-getting was found to be significantly higher for the abused children (See Table 3).

Peer social status was assessed by the Dodge, Coie, and Coppotelli peer nomination procedure, modified from a 3- to a 2-choice procedure to better accommodate the small class sizes of those children who were in special education. The variables we derived to describe social status were Social Preference (based on positive minus negative choices received from classmates), Social Impact (based on positive plus negative choices), Reciprocity of positive choice, and derived categories of social status (Popular, Rejected, Neglected, Controversial and Average).

The single most important hypothesis of the study -- namely, that abused preadolescent children would show lower social status

among their peers -- was borne out by the data (See Figure 3).
Although not all abused children showed negative status, it is
clear that there are almost twice as many abused children with
negative status than control children and twice as many control
children with positive status than abused children. An overall
multivariate test (Hotelling's $\underline{T}^2$) based on the entire set of
peer social status variables was carried out on matched pairs of
abused and control children and revealed a significant difference
between the children ($\underline{F}$, 7/71 = 2.23, $\underline{p}$ = .04). An incremental
test comparing the contribution of each of the variables to the
differentiation of abuse from non-abuse showed that social
preference alone was the best predictor and accounted for 13% of
the variance (p = .0009).

Referring back to the model, we see that one of the
hypotheses it suggests is that specific behaviors the children
display to peers account significantly for the association
between abuse and social status. A stepwise MRC, carried out on
the relationship between the set of 6 behaviors rated by the
children (shyness, leadership, fighting, sharing, meanness, and
attention-getting) and that portion of the variance of peer
social status associated with abuse, revealed that leadership and
fightii j each contributed significantly to the relatiosnhip ($\underline{F}$ =
61.34, $\underline{p}$ = .0001 and $\underline{F}$ = 12.86, $\underline{p}$ = .0005, respectively) and
together accounted for 45% of the variance (p = .0001).

The relationship between specific behaviors and peer status
can also be seen in Table 4 and Figure 4 where popular children

are rated highest on leadership and sharing; rejected children
are rated highest on fighting and meanness and lowest on
leadership and sharing; neglected children are rated highest on
shyness; controversial children, like popular children, are low
on shyness, and while they are second highest on leadership, they
also are second highest on fighting and meanness.

The model further suggests that the greater overall
disturbance of abused children both contributes to the
association between abuse and social status and has more far
reaching and pervasive effects with respect to the children's
general level of functioning. A hierarchical MRC was carried out
in which Teacher and Parent Achenbach Problem Behavior ratings
were added to the peer ratings of the specific behaviors,
leadership and fighting, to test whether they significantly
improved the association. They were not found to add
independently. However, both, but especially the Parent Ratings,
were found to be significantly correlated with that portion of
the abuse/non-abuse variance not associated with peer social
status. (R^2 for Parent Total Problem Behavior Ratings = .12, F =
19.501, p = .0001 and R^2 for Teacher Total Problem Behavior
Ratings = .03, F = 5.108, p = .025).

Again, going back to the model, let us examine the question
of whether household violence is predictive of the children's
general level of disturbance and adaptive behavior or whether it
is predictive of specific child behaviors. Examination of violent
behavior in all households, regardless of their abuse status,

shows that violent behavior does indeed have a significant relationship to children's general disturbance and adaptative functioning. All of 18 single and composite indices of family violence were found to significantly predict Parent Ratings of Total Behavior Problems, Externalizing Problem Behavior, and Internalizing Problem Behavior (with the highest R^2 = .22) and 13 of the same indices significantly predicted Teacher Ratings, although the association was not as strong (highest R^2 = .15). Furthermore, lack of family violence was predictive of general adaptive functioning as rated by Teachers (R^2 = .17), although not by parents. Within ea of the two samples, where the range of violent behavior is greatly restricted, correlations with children's general disturbance and adaptive behavior were found not to be significant. (It should be remembered, however, that the means for most family violence measures are significantly higher for the abuse than the control families (See Table 1).)

Measures of violent family interaction for the combined sample were not found to be predictive of most specific child behaviors, as measured by the children's peer ratings, except for one composite measure of overall severity of abusive behavior to the child him or herself, which showed a significant relationship with fighting (R^2 = .16) and meanness (R^2 = .12). Within the abuse sample alone, however, various measures of abuse involving the child directly, strongly predicted high peer ratings of the specific behaviors of fighting and meanness (R^2s ranging from .22 to .50).

Concerning the issue of whether patterns of family violence differentially predict externalizing and internalizing behavioral disturbance, our results are not yet clear. It looks like both severity of abuse to the child and pervasiveness of abuse within the household both predict externalizing disturbance, of a general as well as a specific nature, better than they predict internalizing disturbance. We cannot yet tell whether this is because we are not finding children who were singled out within the family for severe abuse early in life, or whether in fact violence is pervasive in virtually all abusive households, or whether our data are too unreliable and incomplete concerning the children's early histories. Possibly the lack of differentiation has also to do with the fact that very few children in either sample were rated as shy at all and very few children were found to be socially neglected by their peers. Perhaps in a more socioeconomically advantaged sample, we would be more likely to find children exhibiting problems of an internalizing nature. It may well be the case that violence both within the family and in the neighborhoods from which our children come, is so pervasive that violent behavior becomes the norm.

To sum up, our results are consistent with a model of the effects of physical abuse on child peer status which posits that family patterns of violent behavior both predict general behavioral disturbance in the children and provide models for the adoption of aggressive behavior in children. It further suggests that the aggressive behavior that the children exhibit to peers

largely accounts for the abused children's lowered social status among peers. And finally it suggests that the generally high level of behavioral disturbance found in abused children has far reaching and pervasive effects on the children's functioning in areas over and above those having to do with their social status.

Table 1

Means of Logged Family Interaction Measures

	Abuse		Control	
	M	**N**	**M**	**N**
Spouse severe discord	.22	68	.15	69
Adult/Adult violence				
child <3 years	.17	47	.11	62
past year	.13	63	.04	69
any time	.23	55	.10	63
Freq. of severe abuse				
to target child	.44	72	.11	67
to other child	.27	55	.05	63
Child/child violence	.23	65	.18	64
Bodily injury				
to target child	.27	71	.02	70
to anyone else	.15	67	.07	70
everyone	.36	66	.08	70
Removal from home				
child	.12	65	.01	70
anyone	.11	72	.02	71
Household verbal abuse when child <3	.27	57	.22	63
Household physical abuse when child <3	.20	56	.14	62
Age when abuse began	.51	46	.14	64
Severity to child	.55	53	.26	62
Type of abuse to child	.55	64	.23	67
Target and/or witness	.54	63	.18	63
M	.30		.13	

Table 2

Behavior Ratings (Achenbach)

| | Abuse | | Control | | |
	M	N	M	N	p
Parents					
Total Behavior Problems	66.07	70	57.40	68	.0001
Internalizing	61.60	70	56.71	68	.0024
Externalizing	66.04	70	56.40	68	.0001
Social Competence	35.43	70	38.00	68	NS
Teachers					
Total Behavior Problems	63.16	79	56.89	74	.0008
Internalizing	59.09	79	55.19	74	.001
Externalizing	63.58	79	57.61	74	.003
Adaptive Functioning	38.08	78	42.81	72	.02

Table 3

Peer Social Behavior Ratings

| | Abuse | | Control | | |
	$\underline{M}$	$\underline{N}$	$\underline{M}$	$\underline{N}$	$\underline{p}$
Shyness	1.83	70	1.86	68	NS
Leadership	2.15	70	2.60	68	.009
Fighting	2.73	70	2.25	68	.007
Sharing	2.58	70	3.04	68	.0005
Meanness	2.56	70	2.13	68	.010
Attention-getting	2.72	70	2.39	68	.003

Table 4

Means of Peer Social Behavior Ratings

for Five Social Status Groups

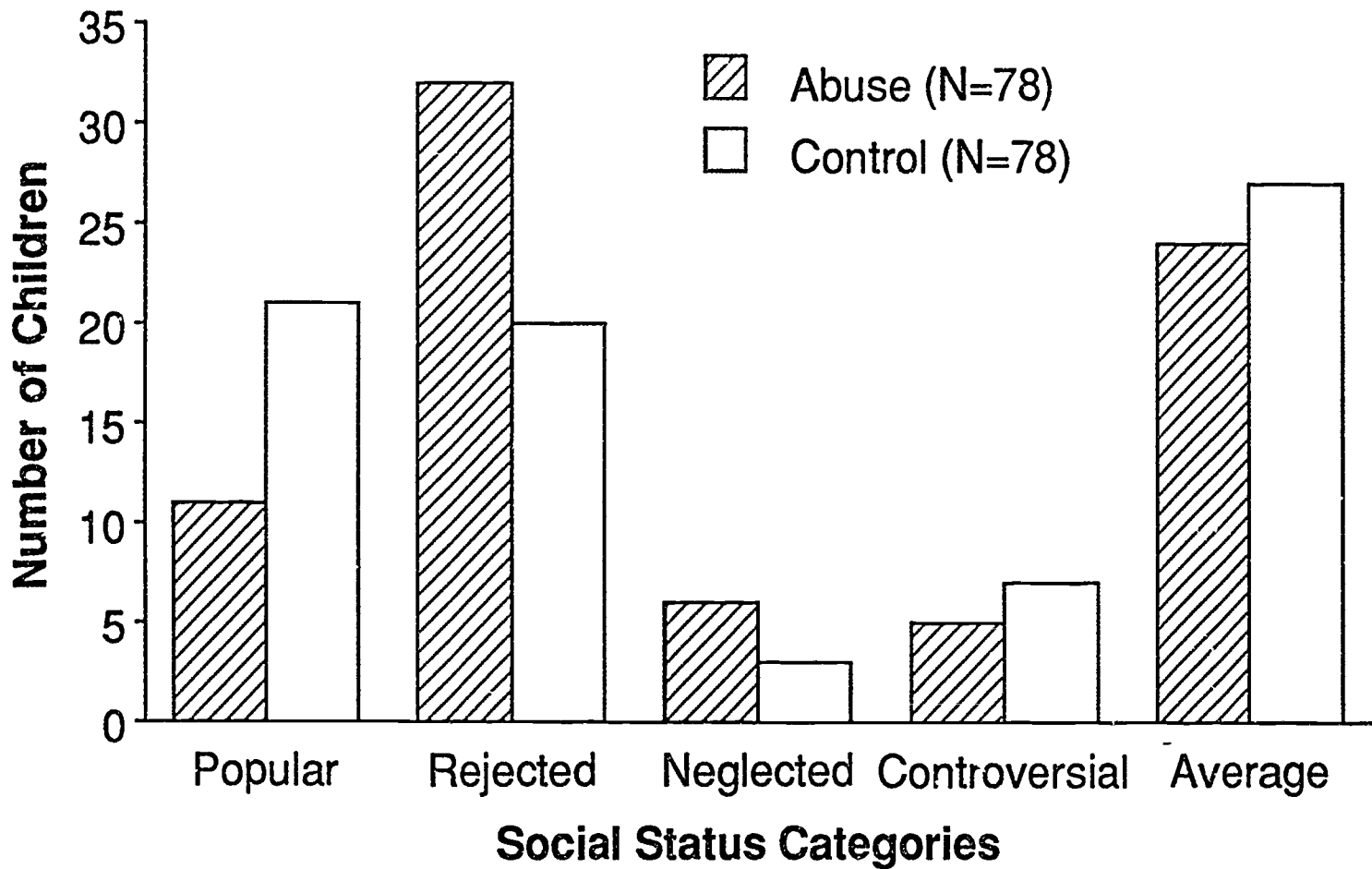| Social Behavior	Social Status Group					$\underline{P}$ level
	Popular	Rejected	Neglected	Controversial	Average	
Shyness	1.67	1.90	2.06	1.66	1.89	NS
Leadership	3.05	1.87	2.09	2.67	2.48	.0001
Fighting	2.05	3.04	2.07	2.80	2.20	.0001
Sharing	3.40	2.23	2.90	2.97	2.98	.0001
Meanness	2.10	2.79	1.79	2.51	2.13	.0001
Attention-getting	2.47	2.69	2.44	2.61	2.48	NS

Fig. 3. Number of abused and control children
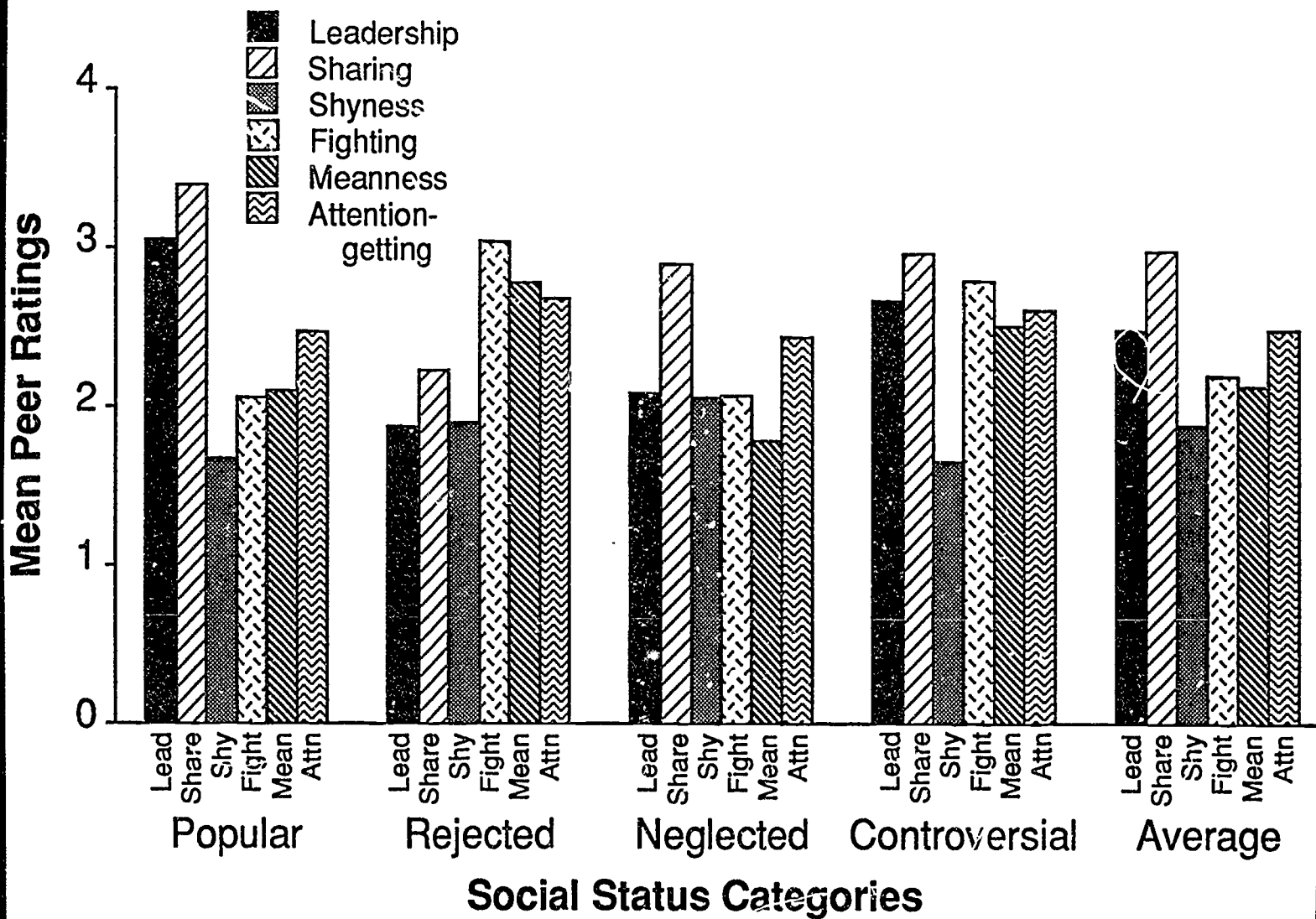in each social status category.

Fig 4. Mean peer behavior ratings for each social status category for combined abuse and control sampie (N=156).