TOWARD A GENDERED SOCIAL BOND/MALE PEER SUPPORT THEORY OF UNIVERSITY WOMAN ABUSE*

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Abstract. Despite many calls for integrated woman abuse theories, few have made any such attempts. Taking as a starting point that gender blind and conservative theories may still have some value, Hirschi's social bond theory is examined with insights from feminist male peer support theory and other critical perspectives. The goal is not a formal new theory but rather a heuristic designed to show the value of adding feminist insight to gender blind theory. Hirschi is turned upside down here with an argument that attachment and involvement with conventional peers may in fact promulgate violence against women on college campuses when it is noted that conventional institutions are patriarchal and part of a rape culture. University groups (social fraternities, sports teams, etc.) may enforce adherence through homophobia and group pressure, while promoting a hypermasculine culture that encourages men to use coercion and force to increase their count of sexual encounters.

Introduction

Among the many theories of woman abuse, few attempt to engage the major theoretical contributions of criminologists (Cardarelli 1997), and integrated theories of woman abuse are rare. The social bond/male peer support model presented here brings together several bodies of knowledge – feminism, masculinities, control theory, and male peer support – partially in response to Miller and Wellford's (1997) call for theory integration in explaining male-to-female victimization, and following a growing trend among criminologists to develop integrated theories (e.g., Barak 1998; Messner, Krohn, and Liska 1990). Further, like the theoretical contributions made by Ellis (1989), Young (1999), and Branch, Sellers, and Cochran (2001), our model shows that consensus or middle range theories that have been sharply attacked for ignoring gender may still have useful theoretical constructs that can be combined with critical insights.

Our starting point is that no woman abuse theory has attempted to examine one of the most popular theories in criminology and delinquency: Hirschi's (1969) social bond perspective. Hirschi's inherently conservative account does not seem likely to enhance a feminist sociological understanding of what Stanko (1985) termed "intimate intrusions," such as rape, beatings, and psychological abuse. As is typical of criminological theories of the past, social bond theory was developed in a social and historical context that ignored any notion of gendered power.[1]

The gendered social bond/peer support theory we develop also corrects a problem with Hirschi's original formulation by placing more emphasis on group processes. As Sampson (2000) has pointed out, criminological theorizing has been held back by a static logic that focuses attention on only a few explanatory categories and the failure to integrate individual level theories with explanations of social processes that involve the communal aspects of life. Relying on limited and static theories robs us of explanatory power and improved public policy, which are reason enough to proceed even if Hirschi himself had no interest in providing a theory including motivation and gender analysis.

The need to understand gendered power and the emphasis on group processes are both essential parts of the criminological enterprise. Miller and Brunson (2000: 421), for example, argue that the study of group processes is vital to understand the community's role in "shaping young men's normative beliefs about gender and the treatment of young women." This critique also applies to other theories, such as Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activities theory – a traditional perspective to which Schwartz and Pitts added gendered analysis to explain sexual assault on U.S. college campuses (1995; see also Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Alvi, and Tait 2001).

Miller and Barack (1993) argue that a gender-blind theory of crime hides as much as it makes clear, but Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, and Alvi's (2001) work shows that a gender-blind crime theory can be useful when integrated with one or more strands of feminist thought. In this article, we attempt to extend that insight to show that a richer understanding of the common crime of woman abuse results when Hirschi's social bond perspective is brought together with male peer support theories, which argue that it is "the attachments to male peers and the resources that these men provide which encourage and legitimate woman abuse" (DeKeseredy 1990: 130; see also DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993). Integrated theory has a variety of meanings (Barak 1998), but our emphasis is on taking feminist and male peer support theories, which are strong in providing arguments on why offenders are motivated to harm women, and tying these arguments to the suggestions that Hirschi made about the criminal bond. Feminist theories are strongest where

Hirschi is weakest, and the combination of the two has value in explaining male violence.

The discussion here turns much of Hirschi's argument upside down by arguing that bonds to conventional institutions can increase woman abuse in a variety of circumstances because gender inequality is an unacknowledged norm. The value of this approach is in developing a heuristic model. This discussion is less an attempt to improve Hirschi than to take out certain useful parts with explanatory value that can be combined with critical and feminist theoretical perspectives.

The next section discusses the valuable aspects of Hirschi, but there are some very different basic presumptions between our work and his. We do not start from a proposition that people are naturally inclined to commit crime, but rather that abusive behavior is learned from groups who teach that woman abuse is legitimate behavior.

Rethinking Hirschi's Conception of Conformity and Deviance

Informed by Hobbes (1651, 1963), Hirschi presupposes that people are naturally deviant or criminal, and that there is no need to explain something that is natural. Rather, that which is unnatural – conformity – is what must be theorized. He contends that criminal or delinquent acts result when the bond to conventional society is weak or broken. People who have a strong social bond to conventional peers and social institutions (e.g., schools, nuclear family, religion, etc.) are more likely to obey the law because these bonds all promote mutual respect and pro-social behavior.

Hirschi's formulation has been criticized on the grounds that a young man's social bond might be to anti-social peers and institutions. What has not been discussed, however, is the problem that *conventional* institutions and peers might be the ones that are directly or indirectly supporting attitudes of gender inequality, which in turn support gendered violence. What if some behaviors criminologists define as deviant are actually acts of conformity to conventional norms – like gender inequality – that are naturalized by the prevailing ideology?

As one example of conformity that can lead to deviance, one might consider corporations. As Messerschmidt (1993) points out, it is not uncommon for an old boy network to encourage and justify corporate crimes, such as price fixing and violations of occupational health and safety standards. Junior members, almost always men, are recruited who share the network's norms, attitudes, values, and behavioral standards. Attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in these "legitimate" institutions sets

the stage for recidivist corporate criminality that harms workers, consumers, and the environment (Friedrichs 1996).

Like corporations, colleges are conventional institutions that can, under some circumstances, legitimate race, ethnic, class, and gender inequality. Some university organizations may take an active role in legitimating these inequalities, which help to develop a social bond that fosters and justifies woman abuse in an atmosphere that is, unfortunately, conforming rather than deviant. It is not an accident that so many university campuses have very low rates of other serious or violent crime, but at the same time have alarming rates of woman abuse, with more than 25 percent of college women reporting rape or attempted rape victimization in most surveys (Koss and Cleveland 1998; see also Rubenzahl and Corcoran 1998; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). These figures do not even include beatings, harassment, and other gender violence. Further, differing studies have found, depending on the question, that between 25 and 60 percent of male college students reported some likelihood that they would rape a woman if they could get away with it (Briere and Malamuth 1983; Russell 1998). Thus, in this setting, rather than a rare event committed by a few deviant men, "the experience of violent intrusion – or the threat of such intrusion – is a common thread in the fabric of women's everyday lives" (Renzetti 1995: 3).

In this article, we offer a social bond/male peer support perspective, which, like Hirschi's, is a theory of conformity. One can make the argument that in subcultures of extensive victimization, it is men who *do not* engage in woman abuse who are the deviants and whose bond to the dominant patriarchal social order is weak or broken. The perspective we offer here is not a predictive model. Rather, like DeKeseredy and Schwartz's (1993) male peer support model, it is a heuristic perspective and does not attempt to isolate specific offenders. The development of our theoretical work is influenced by one of the objectives of Barak's (1998: 15) *Integrating Criminologies*: "[T]o accommodate and merge . . . allegedly competing criminologies into some kind of synthesized framework." As Young (1986: 13) notes, just because some progressive or critical scholars state that a theory does "not have the correct conception of human nature in social order" does not mean that it is impossible "to learn from its findings." Rather, the goal is to, as Rock (1992: xi) suggests, end "the criminological cold war and the facile ideological oppositions of the 1970s and 1980s."

Attachment

In Hirschi's theory, attachment refers to the degree to which people have close emotional ties to conventional significant others, such as male friends. The

more attached male students are to their male peers, the more likely they are to take their concerns, feelings, wishes, and expectations into account; which in turn inhibits deviant behavior. However, those who are isolated or detached from peers are less likely to respect the norms, values, and wishes of conventional institutions, including those based on gender inequality. Thus, there is a greater chance that they will engage in deviant activities such as speaking out against woman abuse.

Our concern is with men who are attached to male groups characterized by a hypermasculine subculture. The heterosexual masculinity idealized by such groups produces exaggerated levels of sexual aspiration. One avenue through which men meet these idealized levels of sexual activity is through sexual aggression (Kanin 1967; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 2000; Schwartz and Nogrady 1996). A variety of groups may support a hypermasculine subculture, including social fraternities, athletic teams, gangs, and the military (Rosen and Martin 1998).

On college campuses, social fraternities are often a locus for gender violence (Sanday 1990; O'Sullivan 1995), but researchers also conclude that both varsity and nonvarsity sports teams (Benedict 1997), clubs, dorms, and even off-campus living groups can promote subcultural pressures that are not about sex at all. For example, between 1986 and 1996, 33 percent of the acts of sexual abuse of women allegedly committed by college and professional athletes involved multiple offenders (Crosset, Benedict, and McDonald 1995). Such gang rapes, according to Benedict (1998: 4), have much more to do with "an athlete's need to sustain his standing among his peers than in his need to satisfy his sexual urges. . . ."

Some poor, inner-city men also experience considerable peer pressure to sexually exploit or assault intimate female partners or acquaintances. For example, based on the Chicago Urban Poverty and Family Life Study, Wilson (1996: 99) asserts:

> Males especially feel peer pressure to be sexually active. They said that members of their peer networks brag about their encounters and that they feel obligated to reveal their own sexual exploits. Little consideration is given to the implications or consequences of sexual matters for the longer-term relationship.

Similarly, in his inner city ethnographic study, Bourgois (1995) came to some powerful conclusions on how patriarchal male peer group dynamics contribute to adolescent gang rape.

Quite obviously, there are both "high-risk" and "low-risk" fraternities in terms of promoting a pro-rape culture (Boswell and Spade 1996), and the other institutions listed here will have variations in the propensity for sexual

violence. However, the underlying concern about attachment is explained by one fraternity member:

> I'll say this, at a fraternity, I'd be a liar if I didn't tell you that just the atmosphere of a fraternity *or any group of guys in general* is that they promote how many girls can you have sex with, how many different girls can you have sex with (emphasis supplied by authors). I hear it everyday. At Friday morning breakfast [fraternities on his campus have big parties Thursday night], guys all have stories.
>
> I'd say that 90% of the guys I live with are probably aggressive. . . . You gotta understand that in a fraternity, all the guys are there for common goals, ideals, aspirations. So you get a group of guys who are all thinking the same. Guys will turn on you in a second if you say one thing [to disagree with the group]. After all the things you have to do to get initiated into the house, you better have the same ideals and stuff and the same feelings as the other guys. Because I know in our house, especially, guys are pretty tight. Basically, they're all the same type of guys (quoted in Warshaw 1988: 106).

Of course, there is no reason to accept that all of these young men are always telling the truth when they talk about their sexual successes. Still, these group narratives are shaped both by larger cultural standards, and by the normative structure of the group itself (Miller and Glassner 1997); they "are significant for what they reveal about constructed norms and values" (Miller and Brunson 2000: 428).

In the context of this discussion, these narratives cause problems for men who find that regardless of how hard they try, they cannot locate enough willing women to allow them to fulfill their goal of frequent "scoring." While this is a fact of life for many men, others find that their inability to meet their sexual aspirations causes them to suffer from a feeling of relative deprivation (Kanin 1985).[2] They may feel a strong sense of sexual frustration, not because they are deprived of sex in some objective sense, but because they feel inadequate in their attempts to engage in what their peers have defined as the proper amount of sex to establish one's heterosexual masculinity. The cause of their sexual frustration, then, is not biological but rather a "reference-group-anchored sex drive" (Kanin 1967). Some of these men may then become sexually abusive, not so much for the same reasons as stranger rapists, but to "raise the score." Kanin (1967) argues that men who don't belong to such groups are less likely to become sexually abusive. They are more likely to be satisfied, or at least less likely to be dissatisfied, with the nature and extent of their sexual relations.

Attachment (male bonding) is a key means of getting and maintaining patriarchal power, and in many environments there are explicit social norms dictating that a man should not be a loner who does not belong to such groups. "Anything a boy says or does that's different," such as challenging sexist discourse, "can and will be used against him." Youth interact in a "world of developing masculinity in which everything he does or thinks is judged on the basis of the strength or weakness it represents: You are either strong and worthwhile, or weak and worthless" (Kindlon and Thompson 1999: 73).

In fact, many North American men "enforce a taboo against unbonding" (Brake 1980: 151), as the above fraternity member briefly described. Worse, if men belong to patriarchal subcultures and decide to quit due to the development of a feminist consciousness, they face hostility, anger, and the contempt of their former peers (Luxton 1993). Homophobia and the anti-feminist backlash are powerful techniques of social control in dealing with young men who are still forming their masculine identity. Lehne (1995: 332) for example, argues that fear of being labeled homosexual leads many men to participate in anti-female activities: "The taunt 'What are you, a fag?' is used in many ways to encourage certain types of male behavior and to define the limits of 'acceptable' masculinity." It is enough for our argument here that many men will not speak out against anti-female activities for fear of being considered a wimp or traitor (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, and Alvi 2000).

Commitment

The second element of Hirschi's social bond theory is *commitment*, which suggests that – in our context – some college males will conform to the patriarchal social order because they have a strong loyalty to it or at least a stake in conformity. Hirschi feels that rational people will calculate the losses to them from engaging in deviant behavior, and will therefore resist engaging in it. For example, even though they are not part of a peer support group, some men may invest a substantial amount of time and energy in their education or gaining job experience so that they can eventually become part of the mainstream social order.

Regardless of how hard they work to eventually achieve the "American dream," some college men feel that they have much to lose if they don't regularly have sexual relations with women. Since gender identity is never fully achieved, people need to continuously "do gender," which may mean remaining committed to hegemonic masculine ideals. To avoid being labeled a sissy or a fag by members of hypermasculine subcultures and other heterosexual, all-male cohorts, some men use force or date rape drugs to "work a yes" out of women who do not want to have sex with them. Such behavior

proves to themselves and others that they have "genital potency"; that they are heavily involved in heterosexuality (Messerschmidt 2000; Sanday 1990). Forcing women into sexual acts, then, for some men becomes an act of compliance with norms by men who are "committed to a conventional line of action, and . . . therefore committed to conformity" (Hirschi 1969: 21).

Men who behave in ways that deviate from the patriarchal status quo may lose their investment toward getting rich or being one of the campus cool guys. This is one of the key reasons why, like middle-class high school delinquents who are nevertheless successful inside the school environment (Messerschmidt 1993), we hypothesize that empirical study would find male college students who "do masculinity" both by doing well in school and also by abusing dating partners. One can simultaneously prepare for the future through study and exercise and also conform to group norms to physically or sexually abuse others.

Involvement

Hirschi made the argument that the time invested in conventional society was a measure of the social bond, and the likelihood that youth would engage in conventional behaviors. Time spent in conventional activities such as sports, clubs, and fraternities would help to insulate youth from deviant activities. Unfortunately, when looking at woman abuse, these institutions too often have quite the opposite effect. In fact, it is the men who are *not* involved in these activities who seem to have lower rates of woman abuse (Boeringer 1996).

The analysis here turns Hirschi's conception of involvement upside down. Hirschi (1969: 23) contends, "in the end, the leisure of the adolescent produces a set of values, which, in turn, leads to delinquency." In a comment in a footnote, Hirschi (1969: 22) notes that one problem with the "involvement" formulation is that few activities seem to be so all-engrossing that American men are precluded from "plotting sexual deviations." Our argument is that involvement in conventional groups, mediated through hegemonic masculine norms, can lead men to such sexual practices. Coaches at all levels defend locker room talk, which centers mostly on degrading and attacking girls and women (Nelson 1994), and which is an important factor in the inability of so many athletes to relate to women (Telander 1989).

Hirschi's notion of leisure time being problematic has some truth here, however, as there is a growing body of research showing that the amount of time spent with patriarchal peers is related to whether a male engages in female victimization (see Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). For example, Bowker's research on wife beating (1983) found that the more contact women

reported between their abusive husbands and their male friends, the more frequent and severe would be their beatings.

Many college men are heavy and frequent drinkers (Gallagher, Harmon, and Lingenfelter 1994; Margolis 1992; Ward, Chapman, Cohn, White, and Williams 1991), and meeting at bars is arguably a conventional male college student leisure activity (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). Men routinely meet at bars to get drunk, have fun, and to prove that they are not under their girlfriends' control (LeMasters 1975). Women are often the main topic of conversation, including women's sexuality and possible means of controlling it, including the use of violence (Hey 1986; Whitehead 1976). Empirical studies have shown that such routine activities facilitate sexual assaults on dating partners or female acquaintances (see Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, and Alvi 2001).

Another popular college male peer group activity, especially for fraternity members, is to be involved with the consumption of pornography (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998b; Sanday 1990). Although solid evidence is not yet available on this phenomenon, some researchers are claiming that college men may be spending a great deal of time consuming pornography disseminated on the Internet (Alvi, DeKeseredy, and Ellis 2000; Ferguson 1996). Involvement with pornography is related to woman abuse (Bergen 1996; Harmon and Check 1988; Russell 1990). Of the sexually abused women who participated in the Canadian National Survey on Woman Abuse in Dating Relationships, 22.3 percent stated that dating partners' attempts to get them to imitate pornographic scenarios upset them. Furthermore, male respondents who admitted to upsetting a woman this way were also more likely to admit being sexually abusive in dating relationships (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998a).

Belief

Finally, Hirschi argues that those who have a belief in the legitimacy of the hegemonic system of values in a culture are most likely to follow it. Hirschi is correct to assume "the existence of a common value system within the society or group whose norms are violated" (1969: 23). However, the common value system that exists on college campuses and other parts of North America is patriarchal (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998a). Thus, it is not surprising that so few male students are pro-feminist. It is also not surprising that one of the most powerful correlates of woman abuse in school courtship is the ideology of familial patriarchy, because this discourse supports the abuse of women who violate the ideal of male control over women in intimate relationships (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Smith 1990).

Abusive men are simply doing a particular form of masculinity that they have been socialized to believe is the right thing to do. Further, this belief is reinforced by anti-feminist faculty (e.g., Fekete 1994) and campus administrators who ignore or trivialize cases of woman abuse that are brought to their attention (Bernstein 1996; Baldridge and Julius 1998; Hornosty 1996). In the case of athletes, in particular those who commit violence against women, are trained by university officials "to behave without fear of the consequences" (Benedict 1997: 65).

Patriarchal peer groups also reinforce college men's beliefs in the moral validity of being abusive under certain conditions. For example, some men experience guilt and shame after sexually assaulting their dating partners (DeKeseredy 1988). The belief that they did something wrong, however, may disappear after learning group-based justifications for the abuse which identify their victims as legitimate objects of predatory attacks. After hearing from their peers that the women they abused were "pick ups" or "gold diggers," men can convince themselves that they are not deviant and are normal, respectable students (Kanin 1967).

Using Canadian national representative sample survey data, Schwartz and DeKeseredy (2000) found that informational male peer support was a strong predictor of male admitted sexual abuse in dating. Informational support refers to male peer guidance and advice that influences men to sexually, physically, and psychologically assault their dating partners. Further, Ferguson (1996) points to a growing emergence of pro-abuse cyberspace male peer support groups that are also involved in sharing violent pornography through various Internet channels.

Of course, there are many factors besides college life that one can find at blame for a common male belief in the moral correctness of patriarchal values and behaviors. The childhood home is important as the initial site for acquiring such beliefs and values (Berkowitz, Burkhart, and Bourg 1994; Messerschmidt 2000). For example, Bowker (1983) describes a social psychological process in which men, through childhood exposure to their fathers dominating both them and their mothers, develop "standards of gratification" that dictate that they should control their wives and children. By the time they reach junior high school, Rae (1995) found boys already have very strong views of their future as patriarchal household heads that might later maintain their positions through violence. Boys act out these values and standards in middle school and high school dating and courtship relationships, and by then are already deeply integrated into male peer groups that reinforce them (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Messerschmidt 2000).

An additional factor supporting belief in gender inequality is elements of ubiquitous popular culture, such as Hollywood movies, video games, and

certain genres of music, advertising, and television shows. Patriarchal violent messages transmitted by the media tend to increase people's tolerance for sexist discourses and practices, including woman abuse in dating. Consider gangsta rap, a type of music with broad appeal among college students and white, suburban youth. Much gangsta rap sends out strong messages about the way to treat women and "the need for an exaggerated affectless form of masculinity . . . Relationships are characterized as a militarized zone in which men must dominate or be dominated" (Bell and Mattis 2000: 524). Youth who are experimentally exposed to such music later report a higher probability that they would engage in violence than those who were not so exposed (Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto 1995). In other forms of popular music, it is also not uncommon for violence to be promoted as the appropriate method of maintaining patriarchal control. While these messages are aimed heavily at males, women grow up in the same society and hear the same messages. Thus, Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto (1995) found that among female African American adolescents, those exposed to violent rap videos were more likely to accept teen dating violence committed by a male.

Conclusion

An argument made over 10 years ago by Sugarman and Hotaling (1989: 28) still holds true today: "In some ways, dating violence research examines a phenomenon that is still searching for a theory." Perhaps the reason for this is that it proposes to explain deviant behavior but actually is examining confirming behavior. Our main goal has been to provide an integrated theory of conformity which attempts to help explain why men who belong to patriarchal peer groups engage in woman abuse and other sexist practices. This theory suggests that abuse is a byproduct of the men's attempt to maintain a social bond with a conventional or traditional social order marked by gender inequality (Mooney 1996; Young 1999).

This finding is important because the claim that campus woman abuse is relatively uncommon (e.g., Roiphe 1994) has found a responsive chord both inside and outside the academic community. This position is politically comfortable for some university officials, students, and faculty as it avoids having to re-examine the nature of male-female relationships. This discussion represents an alternative position to sexual assault and physical abuse as normal events on the college campus, which is not the same as saying they are morally valid. Rather, they occur frequently, and they are culturally normal in that they are generally supported by much of North American culture and society (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

Of course, Hirschi's view of a social control theory is that it tries to explain why a man who believes in a norm is willing to violate it. If, as we suggest, this man learns an alternative set of beliefs that legitimate the behavior, and nullify societal beliefs against this behavior, then, as Hirschi puts it, "there is, within the context of the theory, nothing to explain" (1969: 23). We contend that woman abuse is socially learned in societies, small groups, or institutions that view woman abuse as a normal and legitimate way of interacting with women (Helliwell 2000; Sanday 1996). The purpose of this discussion, however, was not to show that Hirschi's formulation was correct, but that the addition of a gendered sensitivity and the insights of male peer support theory could make Hirschi's work useful in explaining the existence of woman abuse on college campuses.

Notes

1. Hirschi explicitly ignored female experiences, excluding their self-report data from his statistical analysis, although he does report that this exclusion is "difficult to justify." In *Causes of Delinquency*, Hirschi states in a footnote that "in the analysis which follows, the 'non-Negro' becomes 'white,' and the girls disappear" (1969: 35). Following this, virtually all studies of social bond theory have used all-male samples.
2. Although Kanin (1985) does not cite Merton's (1957) work on relative deprivation, one could argue that his perspective is heavily informed by it and constitutes an important step toward the development of a strain theory of sexual assault on college campuses.

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