



# Male Peer Support Theory: Murder and Sexual Assault

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## Literature Review:

The discovery of the prevalence of sexual assault across a variety of allegedly sacrosanct social institutions, including college campuses, places of worship, the military and in policing, reveals serious a social problem (Benedict, 1998; Ross, 2014). In addition to police sexual assault, a disproportionate number of police shootings are minority group members. Unarmed African Americans are three and half times as likely to be shot compared to whites (Ross, 2015). Unconstitutional use of force and discrimination against minorities as exhibited by police is evidenced by twenty-four DOJ consent decrees issued for a variety law enforcement violations including excessive shootings, use of canines, retaliation against complainants, and discrimination in searches and seizures.

An April 2014 White House Task Force Report, "Not Alone" addressed the problem of sexual assault on college campuses revealing that over 85 colleges and universities mishandled cases of sexual assault. The Department of Justice found this the result of sex discrimination and placed The University of Montana and Missoula under a consent decree for failing to protect women victims, lack of accountability, poor investigations and a lack of transparency (The Clery Center for Security on Campus, 2017). Another DOJ report found that across nine University campuses, twenty-one percent of women were sexually assaulted since entering college (Tajaden, 2000).

This research provides a preliminary analysis of police sexual assaults and homicides as well as sexual violence against students on college campuses.

## Grounded Qualitative Methodological Analysis

This qualitative narrative analysis utilizes feminist structured action theory and male peer support theory of violence against women to frame our understanding of sexual violence against women and homicidal violence against male civilians (Benedict, 1998, DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2013, Messerschmidt, 1993, 1997; and Connell, 2005; and Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Structured action theory posits that the patriarchal social structure and cultural ideology as well as masculine mentoring fosters a sense of entitlement and privilege as well as the subordination of other men and the sexual objectification of women. Male peer support theory argues that this ideology is reinforced and reproduced in male homogenous groups.

## Data

In this data collection study, researchers utilized web based searches of newspapers, magazines and watchdog groups regarding incidents of police, military and university sexual assaults as well as police homicides. We also examined Department of Justice Investigations of police maleficence. Searches were initiated in February of 2016 and remain on-going. As of April 2017, the examination of eighty newspaper or magazine articles and watchdog organizations were utilized in exploring sexual assaults and homicides by police. Additionally, we examined personal memoirs from a published anthology of university rape victims.

## Findings:

A pro-rape and patriarchal culture exists within a variety of law enforcement departments as evidenced by a Department of Justice investigation in 2016 of the Baltimore police Department with regard to the predominantly black female victims of sexual assault.

*"The report painted a picture of police culture deeply dismissive of sexual assault victims and hostile toward prostitutes and transgender people. It branded the Baltimore Police Department's response to sexual assault cases "grossly inadequate".*

Similar patterns of gender bias exist across of number of police departments including New Orleans, Puerto Rico, Boise, Idaho, and Missoula Montana.

One victim of police rape reported:  
*"I didn't call 911 to be the victim".*

This officer was under investigation for five previous incidents of sexual assault. Milwaukee's police department officers investigated by their local district attorneys office for a pattern and practice of illegal strip searches and body cavity searches. This ended in a five million dollar settlement agreement for 74 African American victims.

One police officer when referring to a victim of sexual assault called her:

*"a conniving little whore"*

Our research revealed twenty-two newspaper reports of police sexual assaults from 2008 to 2016; only one was a twenty-two year old case. Two instances included two police officers who offended together. In newspaper reports, six different law enforcement departments exhibited a sub-culture supporting rape and ignoring or dismissing victims' reports. An Associated Press report found that over 1000 police officers lost their badges in a six year period for rape, sodomy or other sexual offenses.

A Buffalo news investigation revealed that once every five days a police officer is caught engaging in sexual assaults or sexual misconduct. They found seven hundred credible cases of officer sexual assault or misconduct over a ten year period from 2005-2015. Other social institutional organizations like universities have been accused of gross mishandling sexual assault allegations. The victims were met with resistance from both the university officials and the police officers.

In 2014, a college rape victim of a 1998 gang rape disclosed the entirety of her story. When the rape occurred almost twenty years ago, no charges were pressed and two of her rapists only served community service hours. The rapists were football players who completed their years at the university with full scholarships. The victim recalls the way the couch invalidated her experience and was the most resistant with regard to her pressing charges. She received death threats against going through with the charges and her friends turned on her in defense of the rapist football players. The victim explained how her case was being dismissed:

*"Turns out, all the men had confessed to wrongdoing and had implicated each other. The DA had misled me when the DA's office told me I had no case. Three years after my rape, the police destroyed my evidence. They had audiotapes of the men implicating each other and the DA had told the police to keep them, and they had destroyed them. The athletic department officials had felt that my rape scandal would bury them; the school was in a hole financially."*

## Police Homicides:

The Tribune reports 535 shootings over the last six years and 92 killings, 80% of which were African Americans shot in poor and high crime areas. Although three individuals were more likely to be involved in these shootings, charges were never filed. The Guardian's investigation from 2015 through 2016 found 1446 people were shot and killed by police in 2016; and in 2016 as of November, 824 individuals were shot and killed. Half of the victims were minority group members in both 2015 and 2016. The Washington Post data revealed 988 people were killed across the country in 2015. It is important to note that the FBI found only 461 justifiable police Homicides in 2013 while in 2015 and 2016 respectively, 42 and 48 officers were killed from gunshots.

## Conclusions

The empirical evidence reveals that male peer support theory (see handout) and structured action theory (see handout) explain police sexual violence against women and violence against minorities. This is illustrated by the number of police organizations found exhibiting a pattern and practice of committing sexual assaults and homicide. Male peer support theory explains male homosocial male group sexual violence against female college students as well as military sexual assaults and police sexual assaults and police homicides. Patriarchal social structures and institutions fail to investigate and sanction this sexual aggression. This is reflected in university athletic institutions that continue to support athletes in spite of evidence revealing participation in sexual assault ( DeKeseredy and Swartz, 2013).

Misogynistic ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and the sexual objectification of women are embedded in these negligent responses and in male peer group support for rape. These beliefs also develop, maintain and reproduce beliefs supporting the domination and subordination of women.

## Recommendations

Some methods of improving the system is to dismantle this subculture, improve education and training of police officers and creating greater oversight by citizens over police practices. Individuals from all across the United States have developed some awareness through activist groups such as End Rape on Campus (EROC), which aims to create a supportive environment for victims and targets policy reform on campuses across America. This empirical work will continue as rapes committed by organized groups all over the world are investigated.

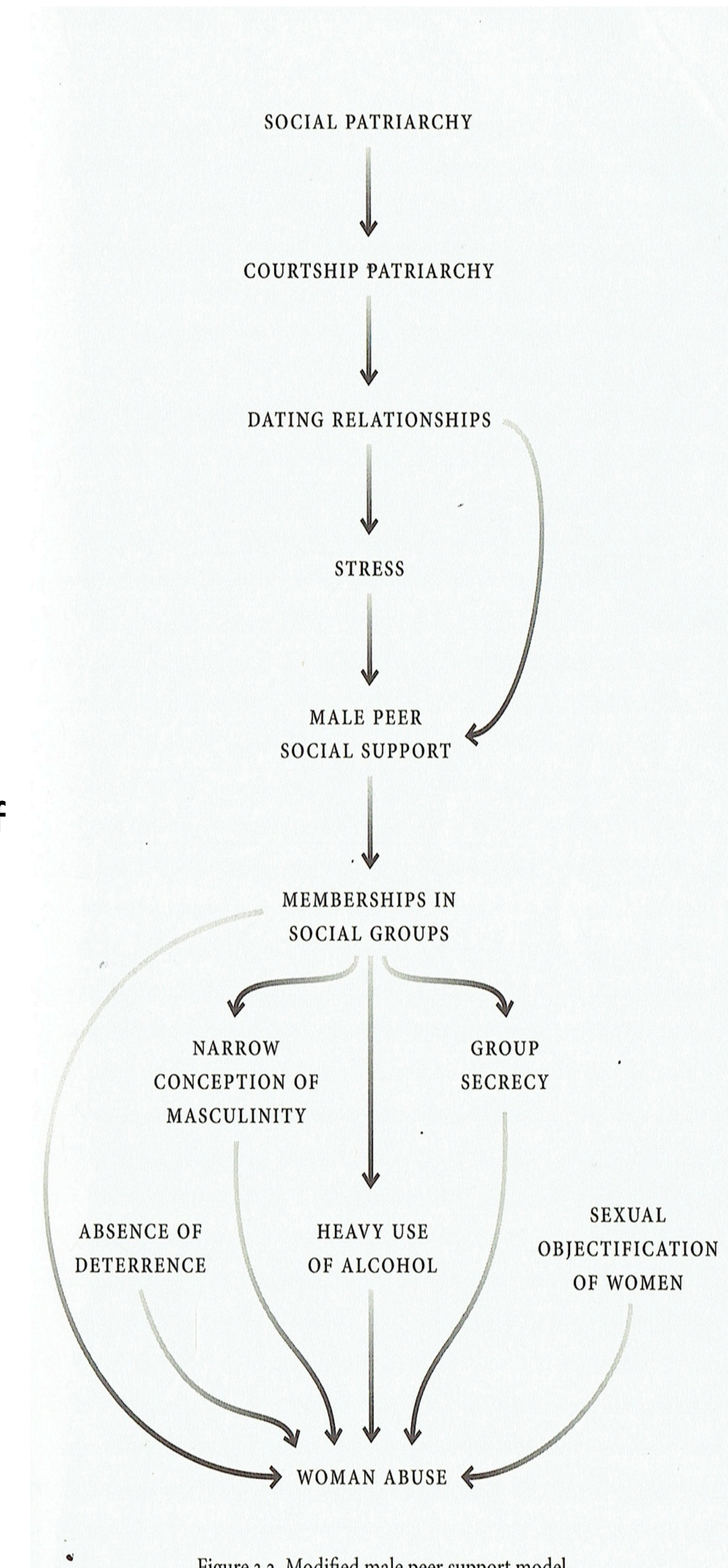


Figure 3.2 Modified male peer support model