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'It just be like that': Young Men's and Women's Attributions of Negative Sexual Behavior

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Abstract

This paper provides an examination of the role that male peer support plays in negative sexual attitudes and behaviors vis-à-vis women. Drawing on semi-structured interview data collected from at risk high school students in an urban Midwestern town, we are able to qualitatively explore attitudes, behaviors, and experiences within this group of young men and women as they relate to negative sexual behaviors. We integrate routine activities theory with a male peer support theory of violence to obtain a more holistic view of negative sexual behaviors. Male peer support models provide us with a theoretical explanation of the variation within motivation, thereby filling a serious gap in the routine activities perspective.

Heretofore work on Male Peer Support Theory has focused on explaining relationship violence and abuse. Male Peer Support Theory combines tenets of learning theories (i.e., Sutherland, 1939) and social bonding theories (i.e., Hirschi, 1969). Counter to Hirschi's (1969) original conceptualization of delinquents as social outsiders and outcasts with weak social bonds, DeKeseredy and colleagues (DeKeseredy, 1990; DeKeseredy & Schwartz 1993, 1995, 2010, 2013; Godenzi, Schwartz, & DeKeseredy, 2001; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, & Alvi, 2001) assert that if individuals are strongly bonded to peers who hold and/or enact anti-female values, then not only will they be more likely to adopt those values as their own, but they will also receive social support from other males who hold such values and enact such behaviors. Simply, the theory suggests that, in some social contexts, negative attitudes toward women and associated violent behaviors directed at them are not defined as deviant or problematic; rather, they are normative. Thus they are transmitted and reinforced as such. This set of attitudes and social reinforcements may not be limited to intimate partner violence/abuse but might also apply to participation in sexual violence.

In the 1990s many scholars began calling for more theoretical integration in criminology research. Miller and Wellford (1997) specifically implored

scholars to begin integrating theories in order to explain woman abuse. In response, Godenzi and colleagues (2001) presented an integrated social bond and male peer support model of woman abuse that borrowed from research on masculinities, feminism, control theory, and male peer support. Hirschi (1969) theorized that deviance was the result of weakened social bonds, but Godenzi and colleagues (2001) argued that some types of deviant behavior are more likely a result of strong social bonds with otherwise conventional male peers, specifically woman abuse. Essentially, it is strong, supportive, bonds between men who share specific values and attitudes that encourage violence against women that encourage and reinforce this behavior. As examined in DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2013), there is ample empirical support in the literature supporting Male Peer Support Theory's explanations of violence against women.

Feminist routine activities theory was first introduced by Schwartz and Pitts (1995) when they examined college sexual assaults. Until then, quantitative tests of routine activities theory were primarily limited to non-sexual and property crimes, and sexual assault was largely ignored. They proposed a feminist routine activities approach to explain the criminogenic convergence of motivated male offenders, available female targets, and an absence of intervention by capable guardians. A key deficiency in existing routine activities approaches to explaining sexual assaults is the assumption of motivation. That is, routine activities theories simply assume that motivation for offending exists, but they do not explain why or how such motivation exists (Cohen & Felson, 1979). This important gap in theory can be filled by integrating male peer support theory with feminist routine activities theories to explain negative sexual behavior and sexual assaults (Schwartz et al., 2001).

In the only paper to jointly test predictions of Male Peer Support Theory and Feminist Routine Activities, Schwartz and colleagues (2001) found alcohol consumption among men (but not women) was positively related to their self-reported perpetration of sexual abuse. Their study also confirmed a strong relationship between receiving advice from peers that encouraged violent behavior and self-reported perpetration of sexual abuse. Importantly, male students in their sample "who drank two or more times a week *and* who had friends who gave them peer support" were up to 9 times as likely to self-report sexual abuse perpetration (pp. 645-6, emphasis added).

The bulk of research in this vein has focused on college students, and for good reason. A multitude of data sources indicate high levels of sexual victimization in that population. Studies done in the US and Canada produce yearly victimization rates of around 3% of respondents to upwards of 25%, with most studies producing figures of around 10% in a 12-month period (see DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998; Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2010; Schwartz & Pitts, 1995). The National College Women Sexual Victimization survey found that 12% of incoming female students had experienced either an attempted or completed sexual assault victimization before coming to college. The

National College Health Risk Behavior Survey (NCHRBS) found that among those college-age women who had experienced a sexual victimization, 71% had this experience before college (Fisher et al., 2010).

Clearly, sexual victimization among young women is widely prevalent and strongly interconnected with socializing behavior among college-age populations. Some data suggest these negative sexual experiences extend into the high school environment. However, the interactional contexts of sexual assault within this age group have been less explored than the interactional contexts of their older peers. There is a lack of research on sexual assault in adolescent populations for a multitude of reasons; the primary reason is scholars' inability to gain access to adolescents for the purpose of studying sexual assault. School boards and Institutional Review Boards, until recently, have made it nearly impossible to study sexual assault issues in junior high and high schools. The tendency to use schools and community centers to assist sampling make it difficult to gather a generalizable sample of adolescents.

While much of this work examines micro- or meso-level situations and experiences, scholars have mainly attributed these outcomes ultimately to constellations of gendered beliefs about women, men, and sex. Masculinity as a cultural force and social construct is central to these theoretical interpretations. Yet, prior research has established that there are differences in masculinities across class, geographical, racial and ethnic lines. This sample is African American juveniles from lower socio-economic urban neighborhoods. African American men in various social contexts appear to hold different attitudes and values vis-à-vis gender than their White counterparts. Konrad and Harris (2002), in a disaggregating analysis of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), found African Americans more conservative and traditional in how they rated the desirability of feminine traits or behaviors. There is also a variation in how masculinity is perceived within African American communities. Hunter and Davis's (1992) interviews with African American men highlight the multidimensionality of masculinity as seen and enacted by their interviewees, yet found issues of autonomy and control to be central across their sample. Oliver's (1994) work highlights the availability of "playa" (see also Majors & Billson, 1996) and "tough guy" as alternative masculinity constructs in lower-income African American neighborhoods (see also Mullins, 2006). Anderson (1999), as well as others (i.e., Jacobs & Wright, 2006; Oliver, 1994) have firmly linked these attitudes and self-presentations to extant street crime subculture networks.

Ray and Rosow (2010) explored patriarchal discourses of sexuality as well as the perceptions of women and found that, among fraternity members, White males were more likely to present accounts of their interactions with women that were sexually focused and drew upon patriarchal discourses of sexuality as well as their perceptions of women. African American fraternity members, however, provided more romantic accounts of dating and

interactions with women. They also tended to be critical of the sexually exploitative environments discussed by much sexual violence literature. However, African American males attending a university are not representative of the broader population and we can expect the attitudes of at-risk youth to be different.

This paper draws upon the conceptual frameworks of Male Peer Support Theory and Feminist Routine Activities Theory. It examines young men and young women's accounts of negative sexual behavior. It builds upon prior research in a number of ways. It examines these issues within an age trajectory previously ignored by this line of inquiry (high school students) and in a different social context (neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage). As Fisher and colleagues (2010) found, 12% of incoming college freshman women had experienced an attempted or completed sexual victimization before going to college. Our data addresses some of the contexts of victimization in this pre-college age group.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

We draw upon the analysis of transcripts of semi-structured interviews with at-risk youth in this paper. We focus on interviewee accounts of dispute episodes collected during a broader project on the role violence plays in the life of youth living in St. Louis, Missouri. St. Louis is a moderately sized Midwestern city, which is highly racially segregated, was hard hit by deindustrialization, and has experienced substantial White flight since the 1960s (see Baybeck & Jones, 2004). These forces have generated neighborhoods burdened with conditions of concentrated poverty and disadvantage known to produce strong street-based social networks and elevated violence. In fact, the city has been a productive site for a number of ethnographically inclined studies of crime and violence (see, for example, Jacobs, 1999; Jacobs & Wright, 2006; Miller, 1998, 2001, 2008; Mullins, 2006; Wright & Decker, 1994, 1997).

During this project, 39 boys and 33 girls were interviewed. Ages ranged from 12 to 19, with a mean of approximately 16 for both genders. Sampling was purposive and this data is not generalizable. Interviewees were at risk for or involved in delinquent activities. All had direct and indirect experiences with violent behavior. The interviews followed an open-ended protocol designed to elicit thick descriptions of the events of interest, with interviewers using follow-up probes in order to obtain a fuller depiction of the contexts in which conflicts and/or violence emerged, situational and interactional features of the events (for instance, what happened, where it happened, who else was present and, the role they played), as well as proximate and distant motivations, and the interpretive meanings research participants brought to these events and processes. These discussions were embedded in broader discussions of neighborhood processes in the interviewees' communities.

The youth interviewed here lived in highly disordered, “highly distressed” neighborhoods. Their neighborhoods were highly racially segregated, low income, with highly disproportionate numbers of unemployed persons, households headed by single females, and households with incomes below the poverty line (Miller, 2008, p.17). Most attended one of two alternative schools designed for students who had been expelled from the Saint Louis public school system. They were exposed to violence directly or vicariously on a daily basis. Gang membership rates were high and illegal narcotics ubiquitous. In short, these youth lived in a highly chaotic and dangerous environment, the effects of which are clear in their narratives (for full discussion of these data please see Miller, 2008, pp. 8-30 and 223).

Research participants were promised strict confidentiality and were provided economic remuneration for their participation. The interview data is very rich, providing extensive and detailed discussions of the interviewees’ attitudes and experiences. Due to questions eliciting information on both school and neighborhood contexts, ample thick descriptions of these interactions’ environments are present allowing for a contextualization of the young men and women’s accounts.

For this project, we engaged in secondary data analysis of the existing interviews. We were provided with cleaned interview transcripts by the original primary investigator on the project; the identities of the original respondents were not known to us. During qualitative analysis, our approach is distinctly informed by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Our initial coding was focused on identifying thematic units (see Krippendorff, 1980) that displayed or informed negative sexual treatment of women in both young men’s and women’s interviews. Excerpts consisted of discussions or descriptions of sexual harassment in schools and on the streets or at parties and other gatherings where women were sexually abused, and individual accounts of personal and vicarious experiences with abusing or being abused. As this is secondary analysis of preexisting data, we were not able to fully implement typical procedures used in grounded theory for the building of understandings; we could not go back to re-interview participants or check our understandings with participants. Yet, our approach to theme identification was carried out by close line-by-line readings and rereadings of the interview materials in an initial process of open coding combined with theoretical memo writing. While we were open to exploration and surprise, our coding efforts were guided by existing theoretical and empirical work in the male peer support and feminist routine activities traditions. Such guided or focused coding is not uncommon in qualitative research (see Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

Our second stage of coding primarily involved the use of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to link major themes back to core theoretical ideas and to “test” the main theoretical predictions of male peer support and feminist routine activities theory. This allowed us to identify the extent of

support for the theories within the data as well as to come to a more finely grained understanding of the variations within the themes, as well as the general amount of support (or lack thereof) for the concepts of interest. Both authors coded, wrote memos, and interpreted the data at hand. Inter-coder uniformity was maintained with frequent discussions and direct comparisons of coding work and theoretical memos generated. Where differences emerged, consensual understanding was achieved through discussion.

While our approach is not classically ethnographic as we were not involved in the field work producing the data analyzed, secondary analysis is still highly useful in producing thick descriptions of cultural contexts, attitudes, and behavior if such materials are present in the data source. As exhibited by prior work published on this data has shown (e.g., Miller, 2008), the rich accounts allow for ample identification and exploration of interaction contexts and emic meanings as reflected in discourse. Further, male peer support and feminist routine activities processes were identified as topics of interest during the research design phase and incorporated into the interview protocols (Miller, personal communication, 2011).

FINDINGS

Young Men's Narratives

The accounts provided are a rich reflection of the gendered lens through which most of the respondents view their world. They are also full of contradictions and equivocations. When queried about sexual violence, many of the respondents backed off initial responses to provide a cognitive map of when such generally undesirable behaviors were in fact tolerated if not expected.

Attributions of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Victims

Far more common than verbalized allowances for physical violence were narratives that either excused young men's negative sexual behaviors or directly blamed women for their own victimization. These findings emerged from questions about the daily and ubiquitous sexual harassment that occurred in schools (or secondarily in neighborhoods), questions about their perceptions of sexual assault victims and their own negative sexual behaviors, especially "running trains" on girls (two males simultaneously having intercourse with one female).

Sixteen of the young men admitted to sexually harassing females either at school or in their neighborhood. This behavior involved sexualized comments as well as touching in a clearly sexualized fashion (i.e., breasts and buttocks). While the young men often dismissed the actions as "play," the young women in the school did not perceive it as such. This is readily apparent in looking at both the girls' and the boys' interviews (see Miller, 2008 for a full examination). Seven boys directly identified a specific "type" of girl who was the target of harassment; of the 34 specific characteristics elicited in probes,

29 were sexually derogatory stereotypes identified by many criminologists as rape myths or rape-supportive attitudes or perspectives.

Eight suggested only “sexually” promiscuous (in the eyes of the harasser) girls were targets of hallway and lunch room harassment. Andrew explained “some of the girls up here...they wild, they don’t give a care about what they do, or care about what people feel....if I’m disrespecting a female [it is] because they nasty.” Nine specifically identified skimpy or revealing dress as the key identifier. Bibby said he would direct his harassing attentions at girls who were “wearing some real skinny shorts and a shirt that’s real little.” Ricky concurred, “You know how they dress right? ... I mean short skirts, you know, see-through blouses, I mean they wear that...high heel shoes.” Any revealing clothing was taken as code for sexual advertisement, which the boys perceived as an invitation to engage in often unwanted verbal and physical sexual harassment.

In addition to specifically mentioning dress, many of the males claimed their harassing behaviors were directed towards young women who acted in a sexualized way with five pointing toward the girl’s “teasing” or self-comportment. Marcus said, “The boys call ‘em names....’cause they [girls] ain’t got no respect for they self.” Similarly, Raymond pointed to girl’s self-respect as being a way to avoid being treated this way. “Some girls get mad and some girls used to being called that so they don’t say nothing...that one girl respect herself and she’ll defend herself. ...[the other] don’t care really ‘bout themselves or just let dudes call ‘em out their name.” As with most of the boys, the onus was on the young women herself to act in a way so as not to draw harassment attention.

Six boys claimed that the girls liked the attention, though some admitted that some girls do while others might find the “attention” and “play” as disrespectful. The following exchange with DeWayne is a case in point:

Interviewer: How do the girls respond if they get grabbed or touched?

DeWayne: They don’t say anything. They be laughing or smiling or something.

Interviewer: All of them are okay with it?

DeWayne: Not all of ‘em. Some of ‘em be yelling and screaming and stuff. Most of ‘em be laughing and smiling.

Daniel provided a similar description,

They [young women] like it....They smile. I mean they don’t show no sign of they don’t like it. Like they being touched... I mean some of ‘em don’t like to be touched, some of ‘em do....[can tell by] they way the female carries herself. What they have on....like tight clothes. Small clothes. Exposing too much....They act more freaky...they wanting to get touched. Want somebody to touch ‘em. Probably just want attention...I

don't know. [but if you ? like that] You go[ing to] get touched on. She set herself out like that.

While these young men provide token acknowledgement that many targets of their behavior find their actions problematic, these accounts attempt to reduce or eliminate the potential negativity of their actions through not only suggesting complicity of girls with the harassment but by definition inverting the situation by saying that most of the victims "enjoy" the experience—a set of attitudes clearly identified in past work as rape supportive attitudes (see especially Scully, 1990).

Trains

As we explained in the methods section, following Miller (2008) we define "trains" as innately coercive sexual interactions. In analyzing narratives of these events, we get a strong sense of how the young men in the data are defining them [before and after the events] and thus understanding their own participation within them. In total, eleven of the boys claimed to have participated in at least one train. Two characteristics of these discourses warrant close examination: views concerning the willingness of the young woman in the event and verbalized attitudes about girls who engage in such behavior. These themes were so strongly interconnected, that once the young men insisted the female was a willing participant, they then segued into providing attributions as to why someone would do it. The demands of gender-appropriate sexual behaviors seemed to strongly shape the world-views that emerged.

All eleven boys who described participating in trains insisted that the woman was a willing partner, some even going out of their way to do so. Most of these assertions were tied to views of sexual consent and participation that were broadly held within the community. Antwain provided the most direct statement in saying that, "don't no dude force no girl to do nuttin." Such a blanket denial of victimization was not uncommon here. Dave similarly insisted the female participants were willing but then drew upon an essentialized discourse often used to justify negative male sexual behavior to explain female behavior.

Interviewer: Why do you think girls were involved in that [train]?

Dave: I don't know, 'cuz they was freaky...they did it 'cuz they wanted to. I guess they was just like that... 'cuz they be horny. They be horny. You know how you got some of these little young girls out here that be hot and just want it, think they handle it.

Carlos's attributions were similar:

Carlos: They do anything, they freaks. They horny, they hormones real high...

Interviewer: But you do it with 'em.

Carlos: So? ...my hormones not that high...I know I can control mine.

Tony's discourse also highlights the blindness many of the young men showed to the potential that a female might not be a willing participant in a sexual encounter while also immediately moving into attribution statements. When asked why a girl would participate in a train, he responded:

Tony : 'Cuz that [running a train] mean she a freak...that mean she wouldn't be faithful...

Interviewer: Are you saying that she would have allowed it to happen to her?

Tony: Yeah, she would've had to....

Interviewer: Why do you think a girl would want to do that?

Tony: I don't know, stupid?

Andrew claimed to have participated in a train one time, framing his narrative to show the young woman in control of the entire encounter. "My friend he knew her so....He already knew she was a freak or whatever so they came in the room or whatever then she got to playing with him and she pulled down his pants and start... you know...And she came over and did me and while she be doing me he was having sex with her." Immediately asked why a girl would participate in this act, he explained, "For a girl to do something like that [run a train], that's nasty....[Boys] even nastier for doing it. They aint got no respect for themselves. Sometime a girl can do that 'cuz they got a broken home or what ever and they just feel they need some attention so they do it like that."

When asked if he would ever date someone who had been a participant in a train, Tyrell consciously grapples with the contradictory social demands of the sexual double standard:

I don't know, man. I wouldn't be attracted to her. I'd probably wanna have sex with her, but I wouldn't wanna....I don't know man, I can't really say. 'Cuz like, if a girl run a train on one dude, but like if I had sex with two girls, I'd want a girl to go with me. I don't see nothing wrong with it, but when a girl do it, it's different....'Cuz it just be like that. It just be like that. If a girl...if a dude got it like that he straight ____, but if a girl do it, it's like she a rat, she a straight rat. She a hoe. It's just be like that. But if I had sex with two girls they [his male peers] gonna give me my props, be happy for me, but if a girl tell another dude that she let somebody run a train all they gonna think is, like, 'Let's go with me and my homies then.'

Tyrell's ambivalence is easy to see and mirrored in the interviews of many of his peers. He forthrightly identifies the tensions between respecting women and the way in which he can earn reputational capital from his peers.

As we discussed earlier, Miller (2008) established the reduction of choices and control girls felt in these situations. Boys' discourses which suggested that females were either unwilling or not in control of the event were rare; they went to great linguistic lengths to establish the women as willing partners, if not the aggressors. Tyrell's account of a train he participated in clearly displays the typical themes

This girl was just like...I ain't even know her, but like I knew her 'cuz I had went to work last year. I talked to this girl...on the phone or whatever. Then my boy when he started working there he already had knew her 'cuz he said he had went to a party with her last year and he was gonna have sex with her then but something about they momma came, the grand-momma came home or something so they ain't get to do it. So one day, he was just like, we was all sitting watching this movie and it was real dark or whatever and she had came in there or whatever and he was just talking to her and he was like "Let's all go head and run a train on you."

She was like "What?" and she started like, "You better go on" then [his friend was] like "for real, let's go over to my house" and then, you know what I'm saying, she was like "naw" and then we got outside after work she was walking over there to the bus stop and he like "You coming over to my house?" She was like "What it look like?" That's how it happened. We got over there [to his friends house] [and] just did whatever. ...

Later, the interview returns to the same event:

Interviewer : You were telling me before about the girl that you and your friend...the girl that you all ran a train on, do you think she felt bad about what she did after the fact?

Tyrell: I can't even say, I don't even know her like that. I can't really say. She do that kinda stuff all the time.

Interviewer: She does?

Tyrell: No, I'm just saying I don't know. If she don't she probably did feel bad, but if she do she probably wouldn't feel bad. She probably be so that she wouldn't trip off it no more. She go to my cousin's school now and she be talking all stuff like "I hate your cousin," but I don't care, I mean I don't even care. She shouldn't have did that. ...'Cuz that's bad man. I mean, I don't know. I can't really say it's bad or nothing 'cuz....

Interviewer: Do you think it was bad that you all did it?

Tyrell: Naw...I don't know. I can't really say it's bad for real. I mean it's bad, but if she didn't really wanna do it she shouldn't have did it.

Interviewer: Do you think she really wanted to do it?

Tyrell: I can't really say 'cuz at first she was like laughing and stuff like "don't," but we didn't pressure her, I didn't say nothing to her for the rest of the day. I probably talk to her, but I say nothing about like that and then she just came with us so I mean she had to want to. If she was thinking we'd be mad at her if she didn't do it, I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you think she really liked your friend?

Tyrell: A little bit, yeah. I think she liked him.

Interviewer: Do you think she did it because she liked him?

Tyrell: I don't know. I can't even really say 'cuz after that she act like she ain't even....I don't know, I can't really say. I know she didn't like him after that, I know she didn't like him. She'll talk to me, but she don't even talk to him at all. Every time they see each other they'll argue.

Interviewer: Do you think she seriously thought that she was coming over there to have sex with both of you all or just one of you?

Tyrell: Both. She knew. ...

Interviewer: Did you all talk to other people about what happened?

Tyrell: Uh, he did. I ain't even say nothing. We going to work the next day, he telling everybody. I'm like damn you shouldn't do that girl like that. He telling everybody, I'm not saying nothing to nobody....She missed like a week of work after that.

While he insists he and his friend did nothing wrong, Tyrell's account reveals otherwise. The young woman missed work for a week and at the time of the interview was clearly still disputing with his friend. Other elements in the accounts tied train experiences to party experiences, with almost every description of a train event involving the consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs being used.

Sexual Assault

Universally, *every* interviewee in the data stated that forcing sex on a woman was wrong. No young man admitted engaging in such behavior, though several could point to instances where peers had done so or told them it was acceptable to do so. Many described situations where they thought some level of force or coercion would be acceptable though they admitted no direct experience with it. For example, Bibby relates a common assumption of what women "owe" their dates when talking about why some men might force women to have sex. "Let's say you took her to the McDondalds, you know, alright I can't understand that [forcing sex on a date], but if you took her to a...real expensive restaurant and you spend a lot of money I think that you should...if you spend all this money [o]n her, then you gotta get something...just to get something in return."

While the research participants seemingly agreed to the general wrongness of sexual assaults, 12 used strong victim blaming language in their discussions about real or hypothetical incidents. Some insisted on women's agency in order to deny the existence of and the harmfulness of the violence. When asked if a woman has a right to say no to a sexual advance, Jamal said, "Yes. If she don't then she just weak-minded. Just doing it to be doing it." His unstated assumption is that the reason girls get victimized is their failure to stand up for themselves; he assumes that men will listen to a female's protestations. Wayne presented a similar attribution, "[S]ome girls be, you know, stuck at they auntie house or something and trying to hurry up and get home and then they get caught up in temptation. All different kinds of ways, anything can happen." The express usage of the language of sin reaffirms the sense of victims' agency for their own victimizations. While it is a weakness and can be forgiven, temptation is something that is "given into" voluntarily. Similarly, when James Terrance was asked if he knew any girls that had been taken advantage of sexually, he responded by rejecting the very existence of "taking advantage" of women by men. "Naw, not for real. What people might see as takin' advantage of, I...that was of they own free will...Like when we ran that train on that girl...people might see that as takin' advantage of her," but he did not.

When asked about ways to improve his neighborhood to make things safer, especially for women, Walter explained:

The thing that should be done for women is this....if a girl don't try to think that they all that and think that they too good to try to talk to certain guys, and then if a girl just come outside with nothing on, your skirt's all the way up here and you got just a bra on, that's telling the guy that you probably want something done to you. It's just a certain way that guys think and if you come outside with a skirt all the way up your butt and you can see all your legs and you can see your stomach and all that stuff and got all that make-up and ain't nothing wrong with your body, that's a key right there that you want guys to look at you like you good and all that stuff.

Interviewer: So you think basically that women are partly to blame for what they call over to themselves?

Walter: Yeah. 'Cuz like everybody says to the dude, the dude shouldn't wear all those baggy clothes and like that a girl shouldn't go outside with no types...not no types, but a girl shouldn't go outside if a girl have a big butt or something like that, with dude like a girl and they got what they want a girl know they shouldn't go outside wearing that type of stuff if they don't want nothing to happen to 'em. ...

Interviewer: And if you wear tight skirts and shirts all the way up?

Walter: Something probably happen to you yeah. It's more like if a dude do it, it's they fault too and if the girls do it it's they fault too. It's both of they fault so the dudes know better than to do it and the girls know better than coming outside or walking around with something like that on.

Walter sets the problem firmly on the shoulders of the victims here. He blames women's strong self-esteem (thinking she's 'all that'), her body type (big butts) and dress as reasons for victimization. He does provide a token acknowledgement of the blameworthy roles males play in such events, yet his discussion is clearly focused on females' public presentations, even things that cannot be controlled by the person (i.e., having a desirable body type).

The young men's narratives clearly show the role that negative attitudes and beliefs toward and about women play in the ways in which they perceive and interact with women. They also make expressly clear the group-context of these beliefs and of the associated actions. To provide a broader image of these attitudes and actions, it is also necessary to examine the narratives of young women in the data.

Female Narratives

While our main interest here is the views and norms that structure the perceptions and actions of the young men in the sample, as DeKeseredy (1990) pointed out, women's viewpoints are critical to understand these processes. Thus, we now detail the key themes which emerged in the young women's accounts of these incidents.

Victim-blaming

The females universally claimed there was no acceptable reason to sexually assault a woman. They were also unsurprisingly highly critical of the boy's harassing behavior. Yet, like the boys, many of the young women also provided accounts and descriptions filled with victim-blaming attributions and assumptions. As shown by Miller (2001) and Kandiyoti (1988), here women were some of the strongest policers of emphasized femininity.

Discussing sexual harassments and whom the males target, Tamika said:

It depends like, the girls that got like bad names...for they-self, cause like...boys they friends stay in the girl neighborhood and they come to school sayin' the girls do this and the girls do that and stuff, so since that's what they say the girl name is in the neighborhood, so they'll come to school and whatever, bring they business and whatever. I don't know like, if it be true. It don't have to be true, they'll come to school and say all kind of stuff, be like, "This girl, she do this and she do that" and all that stuff and they'll touch on 'em. Some of the girls like, the really, really fast lil' girls, the ones who know what they talkin' 'bout, they'll let 'em touch on 'em

and then sometimes, when you don't want them to touch you and stuff, they'll get mad, hit the girl and all that stuff, and they (the girl) don't be doin' nothing.' ... that's disrespectful to theyself so they just [let]...the boys they disrespect them and stuff. I mean, that don't mean they have to but they just should just make that girl feel confident and build up herself, not lower her self-esteem more, though. But I mean, it just some boys that don't care and don't think and the girl she don't care, really she do, but whatever she doin' I think she just do it for attention.

While she acknowledges the disrespectful nature of the boys' behavior, Tamika is far more condemnatory of the failure of those girls who are harassed to "respect" themselves (by not engaging in sexual interactions) than she is of the boys doing the harassing.

Destiny, in witnessing a party-based sexual assault, maintained the victim as the focus of her blame attributions.

Destiny: At a party, it wasn't no party, it's like, it was a group of us and they brought some friends and people brought some friends, and we was just sittin' there chilling and the girl drunk too much and stuff and was lettin' them feel all over her and stuff. ...I mean they was drunk, I mean they wasn't drunk, but they was high too, but they know what they was doin' and to me she know what they was doin' to her. I don't care what nobody say, she knew how to stop that. ... I don't care what nobody say, she was too drunk, she wasn't too drunk to know that that boy was feelin' on her. We drunk the same as much and smoked and nobody, I was like myself. ...

Interviewer: Did you talk to her about that after the fact?

Destiny: Yeah and then she was like "I ain't know, I ain't know." I was like, "how you ain't know when you were talkin' like everybody else." Man I don't care, I still think she want them to do that to her.

Destiny rejects the possibility of incapacitation through intoxication as long as the woman in question is still able to move or talk. Especially through reference to her own behavior and self-control, she derides the woman for lacking similar strengths. Even if we give her accounting of the situation full credence, through witnessing one girl allowing herself to be treated negatively, Destiny is able to discount this entire category of victimization.

Just as some of the boys claimed changing the behavior of victims was the easiest way to make their school and neighborhoods safe, many of the females did so as well. Some boys and girls outright suggested teaching young females how to dress and "carry themselves". Cleshay's response is typical:

I: How do you think we could reduce the kinds of violence against young women that we have been talking about?

Cleshay: Well, women could start wearing them clothes, learn they seasons. They be coming up in here in mini-skirts up to they butt and it's cold, fifty degrees outside. Then they bending over in front of these boys. Sometimes women do bring it on theyselfes, you know what I'm saying, they throwing messages and then once a boy get the, he got a message already in his mind, she wanna act like that ain't the message that she gave him. They can dress like, you know, like ladies and women. Act like young ladies and women. Stop, you knew how the boy was when you first met him. You knew he wasn't about nuttin' [not serious about a relationship], you knew as soon as you went with him he wasn't about nuttin' so don't act like you gonna go into this relationship changing him and all this other stuff.

The main condemnation here seems to be ignorance of the streets and how they work. As other studies of street life subculture have shown, there is little tolerance for and no forgiveness of fools or the uninitiated.

DISCUSSION

Male peer support theory suggests that woman abuse in various forms is catalyzed through normative attitudes held by peer groups; it distinctly frames negative treatment of women as something defined by social networks as positive and reinforced as desirable. Negative attitudes toward and sexual harassment of females was ubiquitous throughout the narratives examined here, with much reinforcement from interactional peers. Young men and women alike wove accounts depicting intensely gendered interactional patterns and normative structures. This manifest in a wide variety of behaviors, from sexualized harassment of girls in schools and the neighborhood by boys (and men) to coercive sexual encounters. Most interviewees here minimally acknowledged the problematic nature of these behaviors, laying responsibility at the feet of the harassers. Yet, young men and women alike provided a host of attributions that placed some, if not all, of the blame for these experiences on the recipients of the harassment. Such neutralizations allow the behavior to be normalized and denuded of perceived harmfulness.

As shown, even when acknowledging the central role of young men's attitudes and peers in the maintaining of these scripts, the data is flush with neutralizations reducing or eliminating the responsibility many young men thought that they held. Most commonly, young men attempted to systematically deny the harmfulness of their behaviors. Framing the sexualized harassment as "play" (a sentiment *not* echoed by the female interviewees—see Miller, 2008), the seriousness of the behavior is mitigated in their perceptions. Further, this frame serves to cognitively disconnect the daily verbal and physical sexual harassment from sexual and physical abuse and violence visited upon young women. These actions are interconnected, forming a continuum of negative sexual behaviors, with behavior ranging from verbal ban-

ter and inappropriate touching on one end with coercive sexual encounters and sexual assaults on the other. Patriarchal attitudes shared by young men and women in the interviewee peer groups provided extensive normative enforcement of negative attitudes toward women in general and attitudes which encouraged such negative behaviors specifically. This is confirmed in our correlational analyses showing that associations between sexist attitudes and sexist behavior. This is supportive of one of the central causal factors in a male peer support approach—not only are such attitudes transmitted and reinforced within the peer group, but individual negative sexual behavior is positively reinforced by those peers as well.

As prevalent, and in some ways more socially powerful, young men often framed accounts of their negative sexual behavior and that of their peers in a way that blamed the young women themselves for being targeted. Drawing on well-heeled motifs of dress, comportment, and reputation, many of the young men made it clear that they blamed the young woman herself for catalyzing the behavior. While in no way surprising, the ubiquity of this discourse suggests that formal and informal social messages attempting to undermine such attitudes have had little influence among this population. This lack of influence is not from a lack of exposure to, or an understanding, of norms of equity; many young men initially responded to questions about negative sexual treatment of women by first providing a socially acceptable response condemning such actions. Yet, more detailed questioning as well as open-ended description of activities (both done and witnessed) showed that attributions of equity co-existed with sexist attributions. These findings extend a male peer support approach in specifying the exact content of the social messages which promote and reinforce such behavior. DeKeseredy (1990) emphasizes the role that peers play in encouraging conformity to sexist attitudes and actions through mundane interactional reinforcements. Our work specifically identifies these messages but shows that they derive from pre-existing norms in US culture. It further reinforces the broader points made by a male peer support model and by feminist routine activities that the encouragement and enactment of woman abuse is ubiquitous and derives from quite banal processes. Simply, daily interactions among men (and women as seen in these interview accounts) draw upon widespread cultural attitudes about women to reinforce negative attitudes and behaviors.

Initial support of gender equity (or at least some levels of inter-gender respect) could be an interview artifact, with some of the interviewees telling researchers what they thought the interviewers wanted to hear. Yet, such subsequent accounts were often little more than a thin veil hiding strongly negative attitudes. Other interviewees presented what appear to be genuine contradictions in their attitudes, vacillating between narratives focusing on respectful treatment of women and disrespectful treatment. This is likely the product of multiple social influences providing contradictory messages. Some of the young men clearly experienced cognitive dissonance, especially

when their narratives provided ample contradictory evidence of women's ascent or ability to exercise agency. This is clear in Tyrell's account of the train he participated in with his friend. His narrative vacillates between insisting the girl was a willing participant, yet he provides clear indication that she wasn't and suffered emotional distress from the event for some time (she missed work and still dislikes Tyrell's friend).

In its most extreme form, denial of victimization manifests as assertions that women were always in control of their actions and any negative or unwanted sexual attention was avoidable if the girl simply asserted herself and her desire (or lack thereof). Dismissing the existence of sexual coercion clearly allowed the males to construct narratives framing their behavior as at least normal and at the most accepted. Combined with the rape-supportive attitudes expressed by many of the interviewees, this created hostile cultural terrain for young women to navigate. Seeing women as able to end a potentially negative sexual encounter at all times and drawing on frames that highlight women's own culpability in initiating the action create an attitudinal recipe for woman abuse, the effects of which are strongly visible in the data and strongly supportive of a male peer support process.

The young men were not the only ones to provide accounts that denied harm or blamed the victim for her own mistreatment. As many scholars before us have noted (Miller, 2001, 2002; Kandiyoti, 1988), women are often stronger policers of masculinist attitudes vis-à-vis women's behavior than men. As examined above, both in reference to their own experiences and the experiences of others, young women's accounts were also rich with victim blaming assertions, producing the same themes and neutralizations seen in the accounts of the young men. The young women did not exempt their own actions or experiences from these overall frames. Self-blame was a common component of girls discussing their own victimization experiences. Even here the role of male peer support is relevant as typically those girls who expressed the strongest masculinist attitudes toward women's physical and sexual victimization considered young men central members of their peer groups. While male peer support models highlight the influence of men on other men in establishing a set of behaviors as normal and expected, this same process appears to be working within young women's attitudes to further support the emically perceived correctness of woman abuse at the hands of men. Thus, young (and older) women are less likely to define such actions when committed by their peers as problematic, especially if it is not directed at them specifically but in some cases even when it is.

Our explorations of the narratives also confirmed an association between specific interactional contexts and female victimization. As Feminist Routine Activities theory suggests, certain environments will create much greater possibilities for women to be victimized by physical or sexual abuse. As work on college environments has shown, here parties and other interactions which combined the mingling of a number of people with the use of al-

cohol or illegal drugs formed a frequent context of female victimization. The young men here acknowledged both using and witnessing “drinking to a yes” behavior—intoxicating a female to reduce her ability to deny sexual consent; all but one of the narratives concerning trains mentioned drugs or alcohol as part of the situational context. Further, accounts of behavior experienced by females or witnessed by either males or females highlighted the role that the victim’s drug and or alcohol consumption played in setting up the event. As with work on sexual assaults among university-aged populations, sexually predatory men use women’s intoxication as part of their calculus of target selection. While not surprising, this serves as an essential acknowledgement that the routine activities of leisure in general frame sexual assault events, especially the combined mingling of men and women with drugs and/or alcohol providing opportunity for men use intoxication in identifying targetable women or to intoxicate a given target to increase her suitability for an assault. It is not unique to college populations, but more broadly grounded within social structures.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the role of male peer support in shaping adolescent men’s negative sexual behaviors towards women. Through exploring narratives and survey responses of young men and young women, we established that negative sexual treatment of women was common throughout the data analyzed. Sexual harassment, which involved verbal banter and unsolicited touching, appeared a constant form of inter-gender interaction, especially in narratives about school-based occurrences. For many of the interviewees, personal and vicarious experiences with female abuse went beyond harassing conversations. Coercive sexual experiences were common, both in the direct and the vicarious experiences of the interviewees. They were clearly understood in an attitudinal context that combined extensive use of neutralizations that denied the harmfulness of such actions as well as that which blamed the victim for their own victimization. In sum, the findings here cast a dim light on the efficacy of school-based programs to engender views of equity among students. The interviewees, regardless of gender, were able to repeat core aspects of these messages when queried about their behaviors, and the strength of attitudes they are exposed to in their peer groups and neighborhoods clearly outweighed whatever effect school-based programs produced.

There is much work in criminology about the lives of young African American men but little rich, qualitative understanding of social networks and roles of peers outside of gangs. The intersection of peers, social bonds, and attitudes remains largely unexamined. While there is generally a lack of male peer support work done on African American men overall, as a reviewer pointed out, this is less a conceptual blind spot of those working in the area and more an artifact of most data being collected in Canada—a population

with a very small African American component that is largely comprised of more recent Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Those of us working in the US, especially those studying urban populations, do not face this problem. Hopefully more research on peer support and “deviant” behavior in such populations will further enrich our understanding of life in those communities and give us better insight into how peer support processes work.

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