Male Peer Support and the Police Culture: Understanding the Resistance and Opposition of Women in Policing

Cortney A. Franklin

ABSTRACT. Research has established the historical underrepresentation of women in policing and the oppression these women have faced in terms of occupational opportunities and social encounters with male police peers. Theories attempting to explain this dynamic fail to posit a direct link between a hypermasculine social structure and the adverse experiences of female police officers. Using Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) male peer support model, this analysis seeks to explain the ways in which the police subculture functions to oppress women in policing. This is accomplished by reviewing the literature on police subcultures and women in policing and situating these findings within Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) theoretical framework. Limitations of the theory are discussed and future research questions are posed. doi: 10.1300/J012v16n03_01 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Police culture, male peer support, gender, women in policing

Historically, women have been disproportionately underrepresented as police officers (Balkin, 1988; Belknap, 2001; Charles, 1981). Additionally, women entering police organizations have encountered ex-
treme resistance by fellow officers (Balkin, 1988; Bell, 1982) and by the organization (Brown, 1998; Brown & Sargent, 1995). This opposition takes a wide range of forms. Numerous theoretical explanations seek to explain this resistance (Balkin, 1988; Berg & Budnick, 1986; Hunt, 1990). Such theories fall short however, in that they have collectively failed to posit a relationship between the existence of a social system (operating within a gendered organization) that specifically acts to oppress women and the resistance women face upon entering the male-only police space.

This analysis builds upon prior research by reviewing the literature on police subculture and resistance to women in policing. It relates these findings to the severe and extreme opposition women face in policing. This article suggests that the hypermasculine nature of the police subculture creates an environment that is hostile to women. Using Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) male peer support model as the theoretical framework, this article explores the existence of a police subculture that specifically acts to promote sexism and misogyny directed against female police officers. This is accomplished first by discussing the difficulties that women have faced in trying to penetrate the police occupation. Second, a brief review of popular theories explaining women’s resistance is presented and the underlying limitations of these theories are discussed. A short summation of gendered organizations sets up the frame of reference with regard to the overarching argument. The following section introduces police culture. Next, Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) male peer support model is defined. This section identifies the individual components of the theory and discusses the way male peer support informs police subculture in the context of resistance to women in policing. This is accomplished through an examination of characteristics of police subcultures. Finally, limitations of the theory are highlighted and future research questions are posed.

**WOMEN AND THE POLICE ORGANIZATION**

The promotion of women to police-oriented roles in the United States did not take place until the last half of the nineteenth century (see Bell, 1982; Berg & Budnick, 1986; Schulz, 1995 for historical reviews). Despite the headway gained by early feminist developments, early female police officers remained responsible for quasi-police or custodial functions where they managed problems dealing with morality issues, women, and juveniles. The roles of early policewomen fit within the
sex-appropriate duties traditionally tasked to women where women are traditionally seen as moral agents responsible for domesticity and child rearing (Bryant, Dunkerley, & Kelland, 1985; Hunt, 1990). When the role of women in policing expanded to encompass more traditional police responsibilities, women were met with extreme resistance and substantial opposition (Balkin, 1988; Flynn, 1982; Heidensohn, 1992; Holdaway & Parker, 1998). This adversity remains a current phenomenon in the police occupation (Heidensohn, 1992; Schultz, 1995).

Female police officers generally receive a host of negative reactions from their male police peers (see Balkin, 1988 for a review). This is manifested in a number of different ways (see Heidensohn, 1992). Women are constantly bombarded with sexual harassment and discrimination in job assignments and promotion opportunities (Holdaway & Parker, 1998; Poole & Pogrebin, 1988). Their capacity to function as capable police officers is questioned and their competence is under constant scrutiny (Balkin, 1988; Bell, 1982; Brown & Sargent, 1995; Poole & Pogrebin, 1988). Additionally, women are ridiculed, isolated, excluded, and degraded through the use of derogatory names and offensive language (Poole & Pogrebin, 1988; Prokos & Padavic, 2002). They have been labeled “lesbians,” “dykes,” “whores,” and are described as “bitchy” and “castrating” in an attempt to reduce and repress their femininity and sexuality (Balkin, 1988; Berg & Budnick, 1986; Hunt, 1990).

Existing literature has found that women report adverse experience with regard to role socialization, group inclusion, peer support, occupational cohesiveness, mentoring opportunities, inappropriate or gendered job expectations and cross-gender interaction (Byrant et al., 1985; Charles, 1981; Haar, 1997; Holdaway & Parker, 1998, Hunt, 1990; Lord, 1986; Poole & Pogrebin, 1998). Further research reports that the inclusion of women affects social organization in police departments influencing division and segmentation often causing conflict among officers (Haar, 1997). In addition, research has established that women are often ostracized and defeminized or deprofessionalized by their male police peers (Bryant et al., 1985). Male police officers generally hold unfavorable perceptions of women working in patrol where women do not measure up to their social and physiological demands and expectations (Balkin, 1988; Brown & Sargent, 1995; Poole & Pogrebin, 1998).

A series of job performance studies and community relations surveys were conducted in the 1970s (Hunt, 1990). This research concluded that (1) women performed duties as well as their male counterparts (see Balkin, 1988; Berg & Budnick, 1986; Poole & Pogrebin, 1988; Schultz, 1995 for a
review) and (2) female officers were publicly regarded as equally capable and competent in carrying out police functions (see Balkin, 1988; Berg & Budnick, 1986). Further research has indicated that in some areas, women perform above average as compared to their male counterparts (see Balkin, 1988; Hunt, 1990 for a review). For example, women are generally better communicators and are more likely to dissolve and diffuse a potentially volatile situation through communication as opposed to responding with violence. Nevertheless, women still face resistance as police officers. Numerous theoretical explanations have been proposed in an attempt to construct meaning from the formal and informal barriers that keep women from fully participating in the police labor force.

THEORIES OF RESISTANCE

Research has cited the structural-functionalist perspective, conflict theory, gender labeling, and socialist feminism as adequate explanations for occupational resistance (Balkin, 1988; Berg & Budnick, 1986; Hunt, 1990). These perspectives relate directly to the theoretical basis for understanding oppression at the institutional level (i.e., gendered job assignments). According to these theories, inherently masculine occupations should be dominated by men. Women have difficulty penetrating the police organization in terms of promotion, deployment, and other pertinent opportunities like networking, information access, and supportive managerial relations because they do not belong there in the first place (see Balkin, 1988). These theories neglect to account for the opposition manifested at the group level. This form of resistance is what constitutes the bulk of women’s oppression perpetrated by male officers.

Researchers have attempted to inform police resistance to women using the institutional structure of policing and ideas about police subculture. An examination of police culture finds theories regarding a set of unspoken rules and beliefs that balance between guiding police action and providing an outlet for police experience (Waddington, 1999). Existing literature on police culture defends (Waddington, 1999) and attempts to explain (Paoline III, 2003; Shearing & Ericson, 1991) these subcultures. The most liberal views define the police culture as a manifestation of male group interaction driven by the unique nature of the police occupation (i.e., stressful, dangerous, and isolated) (Chan, 1996; Waddington, 1999).
Brown and Sargent (1995) propose that informal institutional barriers exist to keep women from participating in the more masculine aspects of the job. They suggest that part of the reason women are underrepresented in policing is due to the lack of encouragement provided by supervisors and the negative responses they receive from male officers. Brown and Sargent (1995) do not, however, provide specific details as to how this takes place in terms of the function of these informal barriers and what drives or causes male peer resistance. Thus, it is necessary to identify the reasons behind and mobilization of this opposition. This is accomplished through a careful examination of male peer support and how it explains police behavior and male resistance.

The following sections introduce the police organization as an inherently masculine institution, setting the foundation for understanding the conceptual basis for the existence and effects of male peer support. This article builds upon the premise that a definite police culture exists and argues that its existence is predicated on the oppression of women entering the police force.

THE POLICE OCCUPATION AS A MASCULINE ORGANIZATION

The police occupation is among the most male dominated of institutions (Balkin, 1988) where men make up a disproportionate number of patrol and supervisory staff (Fielding, 1994b). The study of gender and masculinities and the way they affect behavior is necessary to explain the structure of the police as a gendered organization. Fielding (1994b) assesses the police organization as a gendered social institution highlighting the occurrence of masculine and feminine role regulation and gendered divisions of labor. Gender research on organizations shows that masculine and feminine attributes become institutionalized through their design, organization, procedures, and products (Mills, 1992). An organization refers to the “act and process of social organizing” (Hearn & Parkin, 2001, p. 1). A gendered organization is defined as the process and structure of social relations constituted by and through gender or gendered relations. In other words,

An organization is gendered to the extent that it exhibits the gendered (1) division of labor and authority, (2) decision-making, (3) responsibilities, and (4) existence and occurrence of sex and violence (Hearn & Parkin, 2001). Additionally, within a gendered
organization, gendered value systems are developed highlighting the influential affect of organizational functioning. (Lutze & Bell, 2005, see also Mills, 1992)

Witz and Savage (1992) discuss the gendered nature of organizations as they are pivotal in the process of reinforcing and continuing gendered relations and patterns of gender in society (Mills, 1992). Carrabine and Longhurst (1998) address the importance of organizational power relations in the context of institutional settings. They argue that such relations involve the “construction and reproduction of masculinities” (Carrabine & Longhurst, 1998, p. 164). This can be translated to the police setting where interactions between men and women patrol staff establish value systems and vertical hierarchies of power. The manifestation of these gendered interactions is clearly articulated through an exploration of the police subculture.

**POLICE CULTURE AND MALE PEER SUPPORT**

The police culture is a distinctive occupational subculture (Waddington, 1999) that promotes “masculine values which engender particular views of women, the nature of policing, and of the roles for which men and women officers are believed to be most suitable” (Dick & Jankowicz, 2001, p. 182). Waddington (1999) asserts that police cultures constitute a “cult of masculinity” where aggression, violence, danger, risk taking, and courageously are revered and thought to be fundamental to the task of policing. Waddington (1999) also argues that police cultures are threatened when women enter policing because the introduction of femininity to the work of policing changes what it means to do police work.

The bulk of empirical literature that discusses police cultures uses descriptions of individual components that describe the group identity (see Paoline, 2003). When examining police cultures, it is necessary to understand these components. Herbert (1998) suggests that police cultures are best understood as a collection of six normative components—law, bureaucratic control, adventure/machismo, safety, competence, and morality. Additionally, studies have cited suspiciousness, cynicism, coercive control/power and authority, social isolation, pride, heterosexism, solidarity and group loyalty, mutual trust and support, autonomy and discretion, sexism, confrontation, hyper and hegemonic masculinity, physical conflict resolution, a glorification of violence, a “we/they” dichotomous division of the social world, authoritarian con-
servatism, racism, a desire for action and excitement, and danger as elements inclusive in police peer cultures (Barton, 2003; Brown, 1992; Fielding, 1994b; Harris, 1973; Lefkowitz, 1975; Martin, 1999; Paoline III, 2003; Reiner, 1994; Waddington, 1999). These characteristics collectively form the social systems that serve to keep women from fully participating in policing.

**Male Peer Support**

This phenomenon can be explained using Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) male peer support model. Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) use this model to understand the effects of homogenous male-only populations that support and encourage similar belief systems. Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) male peer support model (see Figure 1) is indicative of the relationship between male peer social groups and their effect on attitudes and behaviors that promote and perpetrate woman abuse. In their discussion of male peer support, Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) define social and courtship patriarchy and its influences on socialization and male behavior, male support group membership, a narrow conception of masculinity, group secrecy, the sexual objectification of women, alcohol consumption, and the absence of deterrence in the context of an elite social group.

Their research focuses on explaining predatory sexual behavior perpetrated by fraternity members in the context of the college campus. The fraternity exemplifies the characteristics of a culture where men, bound together through formal group membership and residing in male-only space, act to reinforce and perpetuate myths about the nature of women. Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) discuss the existence of broad societal forces that reinforce patriarchal ideas about the nature of relations between men and women. This framework can be directly applied to the dynamic of police cultures, because these cultures also operate within an inherently masculine organization and call upon the ideals of patriarchy to inform group behavior (Figure 2).

The male peer support model argues that this group behavior (specifically related to antifeminist ideals) is the function of a combination of variables. Namely, misogynistic outcomes are the result of patriarchal socialization and features of the all-male peer group. While existing theories seek to explain police culture as a manifestation of and response to negative aspects of policing (e.g., dangerousness, threats to life), male peer support argues that these outcomes are largely the result of social variables that exist in male-only populations (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).
It is important to note, however, the difficulty in accounting for the effects of individuals who possess particular traits prior to entering the group as compared to individuals who are affected by and acquire these traits as a result of all-male group membership and social attachment. In other words, certain personalities seek out and are attracted to the police profession because of its inherently masculine and dangerous occupational nature. While this may occur in particular cases, it does not negate the role of all-male peer groups on group-level behavior. Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) would argue that, despite this self-se-
lection process, men who belong to the group are affected and pressured into group think as a result of the male-only peer group and the characteristics associated with this special form of social attachment (see related variables in the discussion of male peer support). Secondary influences, such as an individual’s propensity to seek out masculine or inherently dangerous occupations, may play a small role in the manifested identity of the group; however, male peer support explains antiwoman abuse by focusing on and theorizing about variables related to these male-only peer groups, male social attachment, and related socialization variables. The following sections discuss each component of
the male peer support model within the context of police subcultures in terms of the police peer group.

**Patriarchy**

It is important to briefly define patriarchy and discuss its significance as it is fundamental to understanding society in relation to the value that is placed on masculinity and masculine attributes. Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) separate patriarchy into two conceptual ideas in order to grasp the difference between patriarchy on a broad social level and patriarchy in the context of dating relationships. For the purposes of this analysis, these concepts are combined to encompass the effects of patriarchal socialization on behavior at all levels.

Johnson (1997) defines patriarchy as a society that is “male dominated, male identified, and male centered” (p. 5). He argues that a patriarchal social system exercises authority over women by way of male dominance. This dominance is manifested where positions of power, authority, and decision making are reserved almost exclusively for men. Thus, patriarchy awards men a greater portion of prestige, wealth, and influence than women (Johnson, 1997, 2001). Male identification is expressed when society’s normative ideas about the nature of human experience are associated with the male perspective. Male centeredness exists in patriarchy where the focus is primarily on men. It is important to articulate patriarchy’s fundamental existence as a social context when discussing the effects and nature of patriarchy as it relates to behavior. Patriarchy functions at the systemic level. It is a social system that infiltrates and penetrates all aspects of daily life. This takes place at the individual- and group-level as well as within the organizational structure of institutions. Furthermore, it must be noted that all men are not created equal with relation to their participation in the functioning and privilege associated with patriarchy (Lutze & Bell, forthcoming). Lutze (2003) argues, “Men may differ in the amount of power that they possess over other men and women, but all men within their socioeconomic position possess power over women through their status as men” (p. 203; also see Johnson, 1997, 2001; Kilmartin, 2000). Lutze and Bell (forthcoming) note that while individual men are regularly pressured by patriarchy to respond by enforcing their privilege and proving their masculinity, their individual responses may differ. Likewise, not every man subscribes to patriarchal notions of masculinity and hypermasculinity.
Misogyny

Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) highlight the prevalence of rape myths, victim-blaming, and the sexual objectification of women and the affect each of these have on beliefs and attitudes practiced by male peer groups. These concepts tangibly promote the hatefulfulness of women, thus, they are collapsed under the misogyny umbrella. Misogyny is an integral part of patriarchy because it promotes antifemininity and “fuels men’s sense of superiority, justifies male aggression against women, and works to keep women on the defensive and in their place” (Johnson, 1997, p. 39). Misogyny views women as the object rather than the subject of human existence (Johnson, 1997). This message is reinforced through the use of media outlets that sexually objectify and degrade women (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993; Johnson, 1997; Kilmartin, 2000; Longino, 1995; MacKinnon, 1985, 1995; Russo, 1998; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997; Zillman, 1989).

Patriarchy and misogyny play a role in influencing police cultures as these occupational cultures and their ideals do not operate in a social vacuum. The political and social climate of policing is described as resisting policewomen through the use of degrading and subjugating language (misogyny) and sexual harassment and discrimination (female objectification). Officers address women through the use of profanity (Morash & Harr, 1995) or refuse to speak to them at all (Prokose & Padavic, 2002; Wexler & Logan, 1983), thus exemplifying the value that they place on women and the idea that women do not belong. Women are subordinated by the assignment of weaker and less competent roles (male centeredness), thus limiting the opportunities for promotion, advancement, and deployment (male domination), and negatively stereotyping women as passive, erratic, volatile, and incapable (male identification).

Social Group Membership

Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) argue that male peer support is mobilized by formal social and elite group membership. Although support for abusive behaviors can occur in any social or geographic setting, Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) argue that group membership plays a central role in understanding male peer support because when men belong to a defined social group, the likelihood that they will legitimate and validate their collective abuse beliefs and tendencies increases. Their basic contention is that these all-male populations, defined by a
“group-think” mentality (O’Sullivan, 1993; Sanday, 1990), create sub-cultures where their antiwoman behaviors and belief systems are supported and encouraged. This peer support framework can be used to explain hypermasculinity, aggression, and antiwoman abuse perpetrated in the context of athletic teams, fraternities, military elite, gangs, criminal populations, prison and police cultures, and other male-dominated work environments (Barrett, 1996; Cohen, 1955; Humphrey & Kahn, 2000; Jackson, 1991; Lutze, 2003; Lutze & Murphy, 1999; Messner & Sabo, 1994; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997; Yount, 1991).

A critical component of group membership is dealing with the absence of women in formal social groups. Research indicates that male solidarity and power is influenced and enhanced by sex segregation (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993) and by those who have “quasi-familial bonds” similar to fraternity brothers or police officers (Harris, 1973; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997; Spain, 1992). Additionally, male-only space creates environments that breed exaggerated sex-role stereotypes and aggression directed toward women (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Sanday (1990) argues that degrading ceremonial rituals (i.e., fraternity initiations) serve as an effective mechanism for breaking and bonding men. Police inductions parallel this ritualistic model. These mechanisms speak to the development of a group-think identity (O’Sullivan, 1993; Sanday, 1990).

It is sometimes difficult to conceptually separate individual-level behavior from group action. Additionally, within the group, individuals will not always choose to follow paths of least resistance (Johnson, 1997) in terms of going against the “group identity” (Sanday, 1990). For the purposes of this analysis, the distinction between individual and group level behavior will remain undifferentiated.

Upon entering the police organization, officers gain status, authority, and legitimacy in the use of force and through their defined social and occupational role (Brown & Sargent, 1995). Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) propose that formal group membership plays a defining role in legitimizing and perpetuating male peer support. To understand the significance of group membership in the context of peer support as it refers to police populations, it is necessary to revisit the characteristics of police culture that promote a ‘we/they’ social dichotomy: group isolation, loyalty, and solidarity (Barton, 2003; Bittner, 1974; Brown, 2000; Chan, 1996; Harris, 1973; Heidensohn, 1992; Shernock, 1990; Westmarland, 2001). Bittner (1974) argues that police officers’ fraternal bond segregates them from society and binds them together. Brown (2000) also reveals the “private domain” of police officers as character-
ized by silence and lack of public trust. Mutual support, loyalty, and trustworthiness further promote bonds of cooperation, empathy, and unity in police populations (Barton, 2003; Shernock, 1990) thus reinforcing group camaraderie.

Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) discuss the presence of peer support in athletic teams. This is related to the discussion of police populations where specific commonalities exist between the two group contexts. Namely, athletic teams and police officers are both organized around and taught to sacrifice for a “group goal.” In policing, that group goal is law enforcement. Brown (2000) describes it as a “sense of mission” (p. 250). As such, powerful male bonding occurs within the context of policing.

The mobilization of elite group membership is evident in discussions of the “prevailing sense of rupture that exists between [the police] and the general public” (Herbert, 1998, p. 343). Police subcultures promote the existence of a social group that is isolated, cut off, in opposition to, and differentiated from the rest of the general population (Heidensohn, 1992; Herbert, 1998; Paoline III, 2003). This separatist approach may stem from the social hierarchy caused by police authority and legitimation in law enforcement and the police monopoly on state-issued force. Additionally, unique and distinct uniforms set police members apart from the rest of society, thus reinforcing their elite status and recognizing them as a formal group. Furthermore, police cultures perpetuate ideas of suspiciousness, cynicism, and social isolation. These personality group perspectives serve to further divide and separate police officers from the ills of a gruesome and unsympathetic society.

**Hypermasculinity**

A central component in male peer support is the narrow conception of masculinity. Masculinity is defined as a socially constructed set of values and practices that glorify status, aggression, independence, and dominance. These characteristics ultimately define social authority, success, and power (Johnson, 1997; Kilmartin, 2000; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 2000). Hypermasculinity is therefore defined as “exaggerated masculinity, often with negative social consequences” (Pleck, 1981, p. 96). Levant (1994: as cited in Schwartz and DeKeseredy, 1997) proposes the basic components of hypermasculinity:

Men must (1) avoid all things feminine, (2) severely restrict their emotions, (3) display aggression and toughness, (4) exhibit self-
reliance, (5) strive for achievement and status, (6) exhibit non-relational attitudes toward sexual activity, and (7) engage in homophobia. (p. 69)

It is important to note that there is nothing inherently wrong with men or women possessing masculine attributes. It appears however, that when gender roles are exaggerated and their expression narrowly defined that negative consequences can occur (Lutze & Bell, forthcoming).

Research posits that the socialization of gender has a powerful effect on behavior (see Johnson, 1997; Kilmartin, 2000; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997 for a review). This is manifested as the acceptance of stringent gender roles and gendered guidelines for appropriate behavior. Men use these behaviors to establish their identities both at the individual level and also as a group or social network (Lutze & Murphy, 1999; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Such support or peer networks construct, maintain, and encourage the existence of masculinity and masculine ideals (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003).

When discussing gender sex roles or sex stereotypes, it becomes apparent that patriarchal society generally glorifies traits associated with masculinity and denigrates or rejects those behaviors defined by femininity (Johnson, 1997; Kilmartin, 2000; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Consistent with this value system is the notion that masculine characteristics are dichotomously opposed to feminine behaviors. Thus, women are expected to be feeble, erratic, emotional, dependent, subservient, and passive (Johnson, 1997; Kilmartin, 2000). Patriarchal societies demand adherence to these sex role scripts. Moreover, when men do not follow these stringent gendered guidelines or publicly express feminine attributes, they are considered weak and vulnerable (Lutze, 2003). This is especially true in all-male organizations (Lutze & Murphy, 1999; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

Masculinity, hypermasculinity, and machismo are central and recurring themes in the policing and police culture literature (Chan, 1996; Fielding, 1994; Harris, 1973; Heidensohn, 1992; Herbert, 1998; Prokos & Padavic, 2002; Reiner, 1992). The traditional view of the police occupation is an inherently hypermasculine one (Lord, 1986). It therefore comes as no surprise that the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors portrayed and glorified in police subcultures reflect and praise an ideology structured around and centered upon masculinity.

The peer support component of masculinity speaks to police experiences of aggression, violence, danger, crime-fighting, control, risk, expediency, uncertainty and taking charge of situations (Herbert, 2001;
Hunt, 1990; Prokos & Padavic, 2002). Additionally, ideas about conflict, weapons, competence, skill, law enforcement, authority, independence, and insensitivity run rampant through the subculture of policing (Brown & Sargent, 1995; Chan, 1996; Heidensohn, 1996; Herbert, 2001; Waddington, 1999). Police officers share a myth that policing is about action, excitement, adventure, and force (Brown, Maidmont, & Bull, 1993; Fletcher, 1996; Holdaway & Parker, 1998). Men must be cool, calm, and collected—willing to handle dangerous and highly volatile situations (Bell, 1982). The reality of policing finds that a very small portion of the job is spent in dangerous or potentially violent situations (Hunt, 1990). Instead, officers focus a great deal of their patrol time on citizen encounters and general patrol duties with less time devoted to problem-directed activities such as surveillance and citizen pursuit (Parks et al., 1999). Further, research indicates that police officers spend countless hours with tedious tasks (such as filing paperwork) and duties related to social work (such as managing and maintaining order) (Hunt, 1990).

Existing research establishes the way police cultures devalue actions, attitudes, and behaviors related to feminine roles and femininity (Hunt, 1990). Male police officers use illicit jokes, boasting, and physical sexual prowess as a way to convey this message (Harris, 1974). Women are viewed as physically, mentally, and emotionally unfit for the daunting and intimidating task of policing and do not possess the proper gendered characteristics or social roles to carry out “real police work.” Thus, they should not be part of the police occupation.

Brown and Sargent’s (1995) study of British policewomen’s use of firearms posits that informal barriers create stereotyped police roles for women in British police forces. These informal barriers limit opportunities for women, especially when related to the particularly masculine parts of the job. This is manifested as women are (1) unwilling to volunteer and (2) perceived to be unsuitable for the physical and strength requirements necessary for firearms duties. In addition, Brown and Sargent (1995) found that women were less likely to show interest in becoming an authorized firearms office (AFO). Existing male AFOs reported reasons why women might not be suitable to carry firearms. Among their responses were: “not strong enough,” “would not be able to kill someone should this be necessary,” “not physically fit,” “can’t shoot straight,” and the epitome of stereotyped femininity, “women should not be AFOs because of pre-menstrual tension” (Brown & Sargent, 1995, p. 10).
Absence of Deterrence

In conjunction with membership in social groups, solidarity and social isolation promote the absence of deterrence. Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) argue that peer cultures that are motivated by abuse and antiwoman behavior must be deterred. Without deterrence, behaviors will continue and flourish. In the context of the police organization, existing personalities or mistrust and suspiciousness of the general public engage officers in a “code of silence” manifested as protecting and covering each others’ mistakes (Barton, 2003; Harris, 1973; Herbert, 1998; Hunt, 1990; Shernock, 1990). Officers remain silent and protect their peers in the midst of law breaking and corruption. Reporting another officer’s illegalities represents the worse offense and is considered a betrayal of the brotherhood. This betrayal has the potential to result in the exclusion of peer contact and group exchange (Harris, 1973; Shernock, 1990).

Hunt (1990) supports these claims with her portrayal of officer responses to female police recruits. In her study, policemen were most concerned that the female officers would expose their marital infidelity and corruption in illicit moral and economic activities. Women posed a threat in uncovering the illegalities and lies of fellow male peers. Waddington (1999) argues that police culture differs between that of the patrol officers or lower ranks and those in the administration. The lower ranking officers maintain solidarity as a defense against the punishment-centered bureaucracy (Waddington, 1999). In other words, the camaraderie that exists between officers acts a protective shield against administration, public scrutiny, and bureaucratic control.

Excessive Alcohol Consumption

A final element in Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) male peer support model invokes the use and abuse of alcohol as it affects aggression and antiwoman behavior. Research that investigates sexual and physical aggression and violence against women points to excessive alcohol consumption as a primary predictor associated with these behaviors (see Leonard, 1989). Heavy drinking is positively associated with increased sexual aggression (Abbey, 1991; Bohmer & Parrot, 1993; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997; Ullman et al., 1999), verbal and physical aggression (see Taylor & Chermack, 1993 for a review), power and dominance (Lang et al., 1975), and violence (see Ito, Miller, & Pollock, 1993; Lang et al., 1975 for a review).
Researchers have also established connections between alcohol use and the reduction of inhibitors, thereby reducing the impact (or perception) of the social and legal consequences of such behaviors (Bernat, Calhoun, & Stolp, 1998; Ito et al., 1993). Bernat et al. (1998) cite the behaviors of alcohol-induced sexually aggressive men as (1) typically viewing their relationship with women with hostility and antagonism, (2) having a more promiscuous and impersonal orientation toward sex, and (3) showing greater arousal to depictions of forced intercourse.

This data informs police behavior with respect to the use of alcohol and the perpetuation of abusive stereotypes, aggression, and sexual exploitation directed toward women. Research indicates that police officers consume alcohol at greater levels than the general public (Brown, 1992; Richmond et al., 1999; Kirschman, 1997; Kietrich & Smith, 1986; Waddington, 1999). Past literature suggests that 25% of police officers suffer from serious alcohol dependence (see Violanti, Marshall, & Howe, 1985). Police use of alcohol has been attributed to a coping mechanism for job stress, psychological strain, emotional dissonance, peer pressure, and isolation (Kirschman, 1997; Kohan & O’Connor, 2002; Violanti et al., 1985).

Available literature indicates that high levels of drinking may be directly correlated specifically with the police culture. This could be related to the peer pressure that creates an expectation for police members to engage in heavy drinking. Moreover, the male-oriented nature of police peer groups emphasizes the social and stress advantages of recreational alcohol use. Drinking among police populations has been identified as a way to (1) test officer loyalty, trust, and masculinity among new recruits, (2) develop and foster social bonds, and (3) perpetuate the message that drinking does not constitute deviant behavior (see Dietrich & Smith, 1986 for a complete review).

In her study, Hunt (1990) discusses the way male police officers use after-hours recreational drinking as a way to discern the sexual availability of fellow female officers. When women declined the social invitation, or men were denied sexual access, female officers were ostracized from further social encounters. An interview with a female officer articulates this point: “We were invited to join them in the beginning and now I realize why. It was to see if we were easy... when they saw there was nothing, there was no sense in inviting us anymore” (Hunt, 1990, p. 15). Male police officers were also reluctant to invite female peers for recreational drinking for fear that they would expose their extramarital affairs. The characteristics of mistrust and secrecy lend support to the reasoning behind the exclusion of women in police peer social gatherings.
The use of alcohol among police officers has three repercussions relevant to the theoretical argument at hand: (1) social drinking serves as a way to objectify women by using the reduction of inhibitors as a way to sexualize the social encounter, (2) women are viewed as outsiders where they are unwilling or unable to contribute and be a part of the intense isolation and solidarity (cover up wrongdoings) of their fellow male officers, and (3) by ostracizing women from recreational peer group gatherings, women miss out on bonding opportunities within the culture at the patrol and supervisory or administrative level. The latter has further occupational ramifications—barring women from opportunities, encouragement, and mentoring relationships that are only obtainable through social bonds. Thus, alcohol contributes to the police culture and male peer support dynamic by specifically objectifying women and excluding them from peer relations. In doing this, women are further degraded and devalued and are reduced to the trophy status of a sex object. An argument can be made that this interaction is just “boys being boys.” This assumption reflects the function of a culture that operates within the constraints of a tarnished social system where patriarchy influences the ideology and behaviors of men; it does so at a magnified level within the gendered police organization.

The components of male peer support collectively put forth a foundation for understanding the dynamic of male-only peer groups in terms of the way they function and the values they support and uphold. Additionally, male peer support informs the mobilization of peer culture ideologies that are encouraged in womanless space.

**DISCUSSION**

While Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) provide a theoretical framework for understanding male-only peer relations in the context of abusive behaviors directed toward women, they fail to theoretically establish a connection between the characteristics and ideology of the broader organization and the way they function or interact with the beliefs and ideology of the peer group. Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) frame their argument by providing an understanding of the social system (patriarchy) in which the organization functions with regard to a broader structure that affects behavior and shapes ideology. A disconnect remains, however, in terms of the interaction between the gendered institution and group-level behavior.
This plays out with regard to establishing an understanding of the way the organization affects the existence and characteristics of police cultures. Current theories that seek to explain police cultures do not specifically address the sexist functioning of the organization (masculine dominated and male centered) and the way it motivates and mobilizes the police culture. This analysis attempts to repair the disconnect that exists between institutional functioning and peer group behavior by exploring the gendered nature of organizations and the ways in which they influence the creation of vertical hierarchies and gendered power relations. Moreover, the information contained in this analysis should prompt further theory-building related specifically to the interaction between institutional-level characteristics and group dynamics in male-dominated spheres such as athletic teams, fraternities, and police and military cultures.

With that said, Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) male peer support model serves to theoretically explain the police culture and its fundamental role in the resistance that women face upon entering policing. This is significant for two primary reasons. First, in relating male peer support to an all-male group other than the fraternity, efforts in research and theory building may continue to relate untapped all-male arenas, thus deepening our understanding of male-only socialization and the affects of male peer support.

Second, by furthering our understanding of police culture, police professionals (women in particular) and police administrators can identify the respective and specific roles of male peer support in perpetuating the problem of antiwoman behaviors and resistance to women in policing. Future research in this area should focus on developing empirical measures to test the relevant constructs (i.e., misogyny, hyper-masculinity, social group membership/attachment) and their combined affect on the treatment of female officers in an attempt to further understand the dynamics and functioning of the police culture and resistance to women in policing.

This information serves as a useful mechanism for motivating police administrators to embrace an educational approach aimed at breaking down the barriers of solidarity, secrecy, and mistrust in police cultures with diversity-focused and gender-specific training. Current research has suggested legitimate concerns with training aimed at embracing diversity. These efforts are often underfunded and/or halfheartedly implemented. Additionally, diversity education may be aimed at producing short-term goals (see Johnson, 2001 for a related discussion). Part of the problem may be the lack of accountability and ownership by supervisory
staff and police administration where they play a fundamental role in setting a positive example. Thus, for change to occur, male police professionals at all levels of the institutional hierarchy must identify the damage caused by accepting and participating in an antiwoman ideology. As long as policing continues to revolve around the notion of an “old boy’s club,” both male officers and their female police counterparts will suffer.

**CONCLUSION**

Using Schwartz and DeKeseredy’s (1997) male peer support model and prior literature on police occupational subculture, this analysis has examined the institutional- and group-level components present in police cultures and related them to the dynamics of male peer group functioning. Specifically, this has been accomplished by emphasizing how the male police peer group acts to resist and oppose women entering the police occupation. By examining the gendered nature of the police institution and the theoretical elements of male peer support theory, this article has explained the police culture as a social structure that functions to degrade, subordinate, and oppress female police officers.

**NOTES**

1. To defeminize a police officer is to associate her with the dominant group thus categorizing her as masculine in nature. Defeminized women are not portrayed as female. They are viewed as possessing less *womanness*, and as a result, are competent and successful police officers. Deprofessionalization occurs when female officers are viewed as incompetent police professionals because they are too “lady like.” Their femininity prevents them from success as police officers because it does not correspond with proper gendered behavior (Bryant et al., 1985). This phenomenon is not specific to policing and it can occur in hypermasculine and male-dominated work environments (i.e., Young, 1991). Additional information on the male/female social dichotomy and values associated with these gender roles follows in the discussion on patriarchy and hypermasculinity.

2. The male police officers in Balkin’s (1988) review clearly articulated their stance on the integration of women in traditional law enforcement; “[the men] just don’t want the women in police work” (Balkin, 1988, p. 33).

3. Some argue that such a police culture is dynamic and constitutes multiple or changing cultures depending upon the social reality and geographic location of the police work (see Paoline III, 2003 for a review). Brown (1992) however, suggests that there are central core features, “characterizing police officers which seem intact both over time and [regardless of which] force is studied” (p. 309). She lists a sense of mis-
sion, pessimism, suspiciousness, conservatism, machismo, internal solidarity, racism, and sexism as core features of police subculture. Additionally, Fielding (1994b) argues that, while British police cultures are not monolithic, stagnant, and unchanging, they display “significant similarities in different societies” (p. 46).

4. While earlier theories fail to fully utilize institutional masculinity (at the organizational and group/individual level) as the theoretical foundation for explaining female opposition, some of these theories can inform specific aspects of male peer support. Most notably, role theory (Hunt, 1990) or sex role stereotyping (Balkin, 1988) where gendered ideas of acceptable behavior define and perpetuate proper female roles. This act of assigning and delegating sex roles becomes more apparent in the discussion of hypermasculinity.

5. Media outlets that include but are not limited to magazines, books, television shows, sitcoms, movies, pornographic/erotic media, and advertising.

6. Examples include training, working, partnerships, danger, and adventure.

7. This idea about proper female behavior in the police occupation can be adequately explained using role theory in participation with male peer support. The combination of theoretical explanations is necessary because, while role theory accounts for sex role stereotyping, it neglects to inform the creation, manifestation, and perpetuation of such stereotypes in the context of male-only peer groups.

8. Examples include the police department with regard to police subcultures, the university with regard to fraternities, and the prison administration with regard to inmate subcultures.

9. In this case, the ideology of the peer group would be the normative characteristics of the police culture.

REFERENCES


Shernock, S. (1990). The effects of patrol officers’ defensiveness toward the outside world on their ethical orientations. Criminal Justice Ethics, Summer/Fall, 24-42.


doi: 10.1300/J012v16n03_01