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SEX DIFFERENCES IN SELF-REPORT DELINQUENCY

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Abstract

This study describes the distribution, nature, pattern, and magnitude of sex differences in self-report delinquency. A national probability sample of 1726 youth, ages 11-17, was interviewed using a comprehensive measure of self-report delinquency which includes serious and violent crimes. Major findings include: (1) small but consistent sex differences in numerous delinquent behaviors and in most types of delinquent behavior due to higher offense frequencies of males and greater numbers of male offenders; (2) generally similar patterns of male and female delinquency ($r = .82$); (3) sex differences in the proportion of high frequency offenders; (4) few interaction effects of sex with other demographic variables; and (5) stable sex differences in certain delinquent acts across a decade.

Sex Differences in Self-Report Delinquency

Sex differences have been a growing concern of researchers in the field of delinquency. The resulting studies have increased our understanding, but have not resolved the debate concerning the nature, magnitude, and distribution of these differences. Studies using official and self-report measures of delinquency agree that males are involved in substantially more delinquent behavior than females, but disagree as to the magnitude of this difference. Official statistics report much greater sex differences. Male/female ratios generally fall within the range of 3:1 to 7:1 (Cockburn & Maclay, 1965; Edwards, 1973; Wattenberg & Saunders, 1954; Wolfgang, 1979). The 1978 Uniform Crime Reports indicate a male/female ratio of 3.6:1 for youth under 18 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1979). Male/female ratios observed in self-report delinquency (SRD) studies, on the other hand, are generally in the much lower range of 1.2:1 to 2.5:1 (Campbell, 1977; Clark & Haurek, 1966; Elliott & Voss, 1974; Hindelang, 1971; Jensen & Eve, 1976; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1975; Strimbu et al., 1973; Wise, 1967).

Official and SRD studies also disagree as to the nature of sex differences in delinquency. Official statistics generally report different patterns of delinquent involvement for boys and girls, with boys involved primarily in property and violent offenses (Barker & Adams, 1962; Cockburn & Maclay, 1965; Gibbons & Griswold, 1957), and girls involved in sex and home-related offenses (Barker & Adams, 1962; Cavan & Cavan, 1968; Cockburn & Maclay, 1965; Conway & Bogden, 1977; Gibbons & Griswold, 1957; Hoffman-Bustamante, 1973; Smart, 1976; Vedder & Somerville, 1975). In contrast, SRD studies report greater similarity in the patterns of delinquent involvement

for males and females (Campbell, 1977; Gold, 1970; Hager et al., 1971; Hindelang, 1971; Jensen & Eve, 1976; Shover & Norland, 1978; Wise, 1967).¹

The use of limited samples has impeded the resolution of questions concerning the nature and magnitude of sex differences in delinquency, as well as the larger question of their distribution and pattern. Most studies have employed purposive samples (Andrew, 1976; Clark & Haurek, 1966; Cockburn & Maclay, 1965; Erickson & Jensen, 1977; Gibbons & Griswold, 1957; Hager et al., 1971; Hennessey et al., 1978; Linder et al., 1974; Lombrillo & Hain, 1972; Morris, 1964; Strimbu et al., 1973; Wattenberg & Saunders, 1954; Wise, 1967) or random samples of limited populations (Austin, 1978; Barker & Adams, 1962; Gold, 1970; Hindelang, 1971; Jensen & Eve, 1976; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Meade, 1973; Wechsler & McFadden, 1976). As a result, their findings cannot be generalized to the total adolescent population with any known degree of accuracy. Reliable estimates of the incidence, distribution, and pattern of sex differences in delinquency require the use of national probability samples whose proportions, means, rates, and gradients in delinquent behavior may be generalized to American youth.

A controversy² still surrounds the issue of the best kind of measure to resolve these questions. Despite the controversy, the current study uses a self-report measure. There are several reasons for this: (1) direct measurement of delinquent behavior in SRD measures, as opposed to measurement of official reactions to delinquent behavior in official measures; (2) the ability to examine sex differences across a more comprehensive set of delinquent acts than the restricted range of behaviors commonly included in official records; and (3) the elimination of confounding effects of differential enforcement and reporting practices (Black, 1970) with the actual volume and types of behavior.

The current study describes the distribution, nature, pattern, and magnitude of sex differences in self-report delinquency. Sex differences in proportions of offenders and rates of involvement across a fairly comprehensive range of delinquent acts and types of delinquent behavior are presented for a national probability sample of American adolescents to generate answers to the major questions confronting researchers in this area.

Method

Sample

The National Youth Survey (NYS) is a five-year panel study involving a national probability sample of adolescents. The sample is based on multistage probability sampling procedures.³ The data reported here are based on the first of five annual interviews with the sample.

Procedure

A structured one-hour interview was conducted with each respondent by a trained interviewer in a private setting. Informed consent forms detailing guarantees of the confidentiality and protection of information from legal subpoena and the voluntary nature of participation were signed prior to the interview by each respondent and a parent. The interviews were conducted between January and March of 1977 and involved reports of delinquent behavior and drug use for the calendar year (1976) just ended, as well as responses to a variety of attitudinal, value, and behavioral indices. Each respondent was paid \$5 for completing the interview.

Self-Report Delinquency Measure

General Description. The self-report delinquency measure used in this study was developed in response to major criticisms of earlier SRD measures. Specifically, the new measure: (1) represents the full range of delinquent acts (including serious and violent crimes) to a greater extent than previous measures; (2) minimizes the number of redundant items; (3) uses an open-ended response set⁴ which is more appropriate to precise estimates of the actual number of behaviors committed; and (4) incorporates a one-year time frame which is more suited to accurate recall than the lengthier time frames used in earlier studies, is anchored in a meaningful unit of time (the calendar year), spans seasonal fluctuations in delinquency, and is comparable to annual official statistics such as Uniform Crime Reports and other SRD studies. The resulting measure contains 47 items: 40 delinquency items and 7 drug items.⁵ (See Figure 1.)

Subscales. Sex differences in this paper are reported for total SRD as well as for a series of subscales which provide a more differentiated and systematic picture of the epidemiology of sex differences in delinquent behavior and drug use than that presented in other SRD studies. These subscales are based on a modified and expanded version⁶ of Glaser's (1967) offense typology which includes the following categories:

- (1) predatory crimes against persons (sexual assault, aggravated assault, simple assault, and robbery);
- (2) predatory crimes against property (vandalism, burglary, auto theft, larceny, stolen goods, fraud, and joyriding);
- (3) illegal service crimes (prostitution, selling drugs, and buying/providing liquor for minors);

Figure 1

Self-Reported Delinquency and Drug Use Items
as Employed in the National Youth Survey

How many times in the last year have you:

1. purposely damaged or destroyed property belonging to your parents or other family members.
2. purposely damaged or destroyed property belonging to a school.
3. purposely damaged or destroyed other property that did not belong to you (not counting family or school property).
4. stolen (or tried to steal) a motor vehicle, such as a car or motorcycle.
5. stolen (or tried to steal) something worth more than \$50.
6. knowingly bought, sold or held stolen goods (or tried to do any of these things).
7. thrown objects (such as rocks, snowballs, or bottles) at cars or people.
8. run away from home.
9. lied about your age to gain entrance or to purchase something, for example, lying about your age to buy liquor or get into a movie.
10. carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocket knife.
11. stolen (or tried to steal) things worth \$5 or less.
12. attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing him/her.
13. been paid for having sexual relations with someone.
14. had sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite sex other than your wife/husband.
15. been involved in gang fights.
16. sold marijuana or hashish ("pot," "grass," "hash").
17. cheated on school tests.
18. hitchhiked where it was illegal to do so.
19. stolen money or other things from your parents or other members of your family.
20. hit (or threatened to hit) a teacher or other adult at school.
21. hit (or threatened to hit) one of your parents.
22. hit (or threatened to hit) other students.
23. been loud, rowdy, or unruly in a public place (disorderly conduct).
24. sold hard drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, and LSD.
25. taken a vehicle for a ride (drive) without the owner's permission.
26. bought or provided liquor for a minor.
27. had (or tried to have) sexual relations with someone against their will.
28. used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from other students.
29. used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from a teacher or other adult at school.
30. used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from other people (not students or teachers).
31. avoided paying for such things as movies, bus or subway rides, and food.
32. been drunk in a public place.
33. stolen (or tried to steal) things worth between \$5 and \$50.
34. stolen (or tried to steal) something at school, such as someone's coat from a classroom, locker, or cafeteria, or a book from the library.

Figure 1 (continued)

35. broken into a building or vehicle (or tried to break in) to steal something or just to look around.
36. begged for money or things from strangers.
37. skipped classes without an excuse.
38. failed to return extra change that a cashier gave you by mistake.
39. been suspended from school.
40. made obscene telephone calls, such as calling someone and saying dirty things.

How often in the last year have you used:

41. alcoholic beverages (beer, wine and hard liquor).
42. marijuana - hashish ("grass," "pot," "hash").
43. hallucinogens ("LSD," "Mescaline," "Peyote," "Acid").
44. amphetamines ("Uppers," "Speed," "Whites").
45. barbiturates ("Downers," "Reds").
46. heroin ("Horse," "Smack").
47. cocaine ("Coke").

- (4) public disorder crimes (carrying a concealed weapon, hitchhiking, disorderly conduct, drunkenness, panhandling, obscene phone calls, and marijuana use);
- (5) status crimes (runaway, sexual intercourse, alcohol use, and truancy);
- (6) hard drug use (amphetamine, barbiturate, hallucinogen, heroin, and cocaine use).

In addition, a home delinquency subscale, incorporating four items (stealing from family, home vandalism, hitting parents, and runaway), was used in some analyses to assess the home-related character of male and female delinquency. Also, a drug use scale encompassing hard drugs, marijuana, and alcohol enabled the differentiation of effects of total drug use from hard drug use.

Results

Item-Level Analyses

Mean and Proportion Estimates. Table 1 presents the incidence and distribution of delinquent behavior and drug use by item: (1) the proportion of males and females ever reporting each act; (2) the Pearson chi square statistic (sex by offender/nonoffender) for the test of independence between the proportions of males and females reporting each act; (3) the level of significance of the chi square statistic; (4) the mean number of behaviors reported for each act by sex (actual frequency data for SRD items, derived frequency data for drug items); (5) the F value from one-way analyses of variance on means; and (6) the level of significance of the analyses of variance.⁷

Sex differences at the item level reveal several interesting findings. First, as far as average involvement, there is no behavior in which girls are significantly more involved than boys. Even delinquent behaviors traditionally attributed to females, such as prostitution, show no sex differences. Moreover, boys are involved in 17 (out of 47) behaviors to a significantly greater extent than girls ($p \leq .05$). The previously mentioned findings of greater male involvement in property crimes receive support. There are significant differences in the following property items: damaging other property, stealing more than \$50, evading payment, breaking into a building, and joyriding. Boys are also more involved in the violent crimes of gang fighting, strong-arming students and others, aggravated assault, hitting students, and sexual assault. Although there are sex differences in approximately 30% of the behaviors, males and females generally engage in the same delinquent behaviors. The pattern of male and female involvement is similar: the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient between male and female means across items is .82 ($t = 8.86$, $df=38$, $p < .0001$).⁸

The proportion estimates, which deal with the comparative numbers of male and female offenders, provide a similar picture of male and female delinquency. The proportion of females who are offenders does not exceed the proportion of males who are offenders on any behavior. All behaviors showing a significantly greater average involvement of males also show significantly greater numbers of males involved. In fact, there are significantly greater proportions of males on almost twice as many behaviors as there are sex differences in mean frequencies: 31/47 compared with 17/47. The following eight behaviors -- damaging family property, damaging school property, possessing stolen goods, stealing less than \$5, sexual intercourse, hitting a

teacher, stealing \$5-50, failing to return change -- provide a striking example. The mean frequencies of males and females are not significantly different. However, a significantly greater number ($p \leq .001$) of males are involved in each act. Despite the greater number of differences in proportions, the lack of significant differences in means on certain items results from the large variances involved. Since male means are always larger than female means on SRD items, the major conclusion is that more males are involved in delinquent behavior and at higher rates.

Chi squares on proportions also indicate a greater number of male offenders in many property and violent crimes. Most of the largest sex differences occur on the property crimes of damaging family, school, and other property, stealing more than \$50, possessing stolen goods, stealing less than \$5, evading payment, and breaking into a building, and on the violent crimes of hitting students (chi square statistic = > 170 , $p < .0001$, by far the largest sex difference), gang fighting, aggravated assault, and strong-arming students. Boys comprise two-thirds (or more) of offenders for these acts.

Item Variation within Types of Delinquency. The item analyses also considered the issue of the representativeness of the items and the impact on findings. Steffensmeier (1980) has criticized UCR arrest data for the breadth of the categories because trivial and serious offenses are included in the same categories. An examination of variation at the item level within categories of delinquent behavior in the NYS data suggests that SRD studies are also vulnerable to the same criticism when items of differing seriousness are combined in the same subscale.

Table 1

Proportion of Males and Females Ever Reporting Each Delinquent Act in 1976, Average Number of Acts Reported, and Tests of Significance on Means and Proportions

<u>OFFENSES</u>	Males (N=916) Proportion Ever in 76	Females (N=810) Proportion Ever in 76	Chi Square	Level of Signif- icance	Males (N=916) Mean # of Behaviors	Females (N=810) Mean # of Behaviors	F	Level of Signif- icance
Damaged family prop.	.29	.19	26.83	***	1.27	.47	3.13	NS
Damaged school prop.	.21	.10	42.13	***	1.62	.20	3.08	NS
Damaged other prop.	.24	.10	61.11	***	1.48	.20	7.01	**
Stole motor vehicle	.01	.00	3.12	NS	.03	.00	3.59	NS
Stole something GT\$50	.04	.00	20.66	***	.11	.01	8.18	**
Bought stolen goods	.13	.06	24.54	***	.61	.29	2.19	NS
Thrown objects	.57	.35	80.72	***	14.89	5.73	9.82	**
Runaway	.06	.05	1.23	NS	.10	.08	.64	NS
Lied about age	.27	.26	.56	NS	2.95	2.62	.06	NS
Carried hidden weapon	.10	.02	47.59	***	1.82	.04	7.29	**
Stole something LT\$5	.22	.13	24.67	***	2.01	.44	3.25	NS
Aggravated assault	.09	.03	23.98	***	.28	.05	9.17	**
Prostitution	.01	.01	2.66	NS	.14	.02	.86	NS
Sexual intercourse	.18	.07	46.99	***	3.43	2.04	.94	NS
Gang fights	.17	.07	36.74	***	.42	.16	23.34	***
Sold marijuana	.05	.03	5.18	*	1.31	.29	3.08	NS
Cheated/school test	.50	.47	1.96	NS	2.98	2.83	.10	NS
Hitchhiked	.12	.04	33.97	***	2.17	.15	7.18	**
Stole from family	.17	.13	5.04	*	.47	.96	1.27	NS
Hit teacher	.10	.05	13.40	***	.80	.15	2.09	NS
Hit parents	.06	.06	.02	NS	1.81	.16	1.74	NS
Hit students	.63	.31	172.26	***	8.65	3.03	7.27	**
Disorderly conduct	.35	.29	7.07	**	4.61	1.45	5.96	**
Sold hard drugs	.01	.01	.71	NS	.37	.02	.85	NS
Joyriding	.06	.03	13.32	***	.15	.07	5.35	*
Got liquor for minors	.06	.03	5.64	*	.77	.50	.48	NS
Sexual assault	.02	.01	8.91	**	.07	.01	5.39	*
Strongarmed students	.05	.01	24.10	***	.19	.02	13.09	***
Strongarmed teachers	.01	.00	.90	NS	.12	.01	.92	NS

(Table 1 Continued)

<u>OFFENSES</u>	Males (N=916) Proportion Ever in 76	Females (N=810) Proportion Ever in 76	Chi Square	Level of Signif- icance	Males (N=916) Mean # of Behaviors	Females (N=810) Mean # of Behaviors	F	Level of Signif- icance
Strongarmed others	.04	.02	5.63	*	.18	.04	6.64	**
Evaded payment	.26	.15	33.88	***	2.28	.92	5.00	*
Public drunkenness	.16	.11	7.57	**	1.62	.82	2.51	NS
Stole something \$5-50	.07	.03	12.82	***	.29	.24	.09	NS
Stole at school	.08	.05	8.11	**	.51	.10	2.69	NS
Broke into bldg/car	.06	.02	23.54	***	.22	.03	4.58	*
Panhandled	.03	.02	2.10	NS	.21	.07	2.39	NS
Skipped classes	.34	.29	5.90	*	5.43	2.61	6.26	**
Didn't return change	.33	.24	18.44	***	1.60	1.18	.53	NS
School suspension	.13	.07	20.17	***	.34	.18	5.52	*
Obscene calls	.11	.11	.10	NS	.77	.83	.02	NS
Use of								
Alcohol	.49	.43	7.73	**	9.24	5.50	17.53	***
Marijuana	.18	.16	1.75	NS	7.73	6.64	3.23	NS
Hallucinogens	.02	.02	.02	NS	.15	.12	.11	NS
Amphetamines	.03	.03	.05	NS	.63	.35	.03	NS
Barbiturates	.02	.02	.001	NS	.43	.39	.17	NS
Heroin	.00	.00	3.55	NS	.01	.00	3.55	NS
Cocaine	.02	.01	.57	NS	.07	.04	1.22	NS

* $p \leq .05$
 ** $p \leq .01$
 *** $p \leq .001$

Three examples of variation within categories are presented in Table 2. Mean frequencies and ratios by sex are reported for each type of vandalism, larceny, and assault. Each example illustrates the same point: the magnitude of sex differences varies widely by item within category. The exclusive use of broad summary measures may obscure important differences by type of behavior. This point has been convincingly argued by Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1979) in a recent article. The authors contend that the conflicting findings from official and SRD data are due to the trivial offenses which predominate in SRD measures. While they offer item comparisons in support of their arguments, the examples above (the greater male/female ratio on simple assault against parents as compared to sexual or aggravated assault or on petty larceny as compared to theft \$5-50) provide some discrepant findings. However, the Hindelang et al. position emphasizes the importance of item-level findings.

Table 2

Within-Category Variation in Sex Differences

	<u>Offense Type</u>	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
Example 1	Damaged family property	1.27	.47	3:1
	Damaged school property	1.62	.20	8:1
	Damaged other property	<u>1.48</u>	<u>.20</u>	<u>7:1</u>
	Total Vandalism	4.37	.87	5:1
Example 2	Stole less than \$5	2.01	.44	5:1
	Stole \$5-50	.29	.24	1:1
	Stole more than \$50	<u>.11</u>	<u>.01</u>	<u>11:1</u>
	Total Larceny	2.41	.69	3:1
Example 3	Sexual assault	.07	.01	7:1
	Aggravated assault	.28	.05	6:1
	Simple assault-teachers	.80	.15	5:1
	Simple assault-students	8.65	3.03	3:1
	Simple assault-parents	<u>1.81</u>	<u>.16</u>	<u>11:1</u>
	Total Assault	11.61	3.40	3:1

Scale-Level Analyses

While analyses at the item level are informative in gauging the nature and magnitude of sex differences, item level findings are not as reliable as findings concerning groups of items. This investigation explored sex differences in categories of delinquent behavior: total SRD (including all 47 delinquency and drug items), predatory crimes against persons, predatory crimes against property, illegal service crimes, public disorder crimes, hard drugs, status crimes, home delinquency, and drug use.

Sex Differences in Types of Delinquency. A series of two-way analyses of variance was conducted to test for main and interaction effects of sex by ethnicity, age, social class, and place of residence (urban versus rural).⁹ The main effect of sex is significant in the direction of greater male involvement in all but three cases. Males report significantly more total delinquency than females ($p \leq .001$; male/female ratio = 2:1), a finding comparable with those of earlier SRD studies. There are sex differences ($p \leq .01$) in all subcategories of crime examined in the study, with the exception of illegal service crimes, hard drug use, and home delinquency. Table 3 presents the range of F values and significance values for the main effect of sex on scales without significant interactions (the range of F values depends on the second independent variable used in each analysis); Table 4 shows the male/female ratio of mean involvement by subscale as a summary comparison.

Despite the difference in central tendency indicated by these consistent sex differences, the distribution of responses for males and females shows tremendous overlap. None of the sex differences exceed one standard deviation in magnitude, suggesting that their statistical significance may overstate

Table 3
Sex Differences in Types of Delinquent Behavior

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Range of F Values</u>	<u>Level of Significance</u>
Total SRD	19.75 - 21.94	***
Predatory Crimes Against Persons	8.92 - 9.46	**
Predatory Crimes Against Property	6.78 - 7.72	**
Illegal Services	2.18 - 2.79	NS
Hard Drugs	.002 - .58	NS
Status	9.65 - 11.89	**
Home Delinquency	1.72 - 1.95	NS

* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$
*** $p \leq .001$

Table 4
Male/Female Ratios by Subscale

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
Total SRD	2:1
Predatory Crimes Against Persons	4:1
Predatory Crimes Against Property	2:1
Illegal Services	3:1
Public Disorder	2:1
Hard Drugs	1:1
Status	2:1
Home Delinquency	2:1
Drug Use	1:1

their practical importance. Because the large number of zero scores depresses the means, it lessens the chance of observing actual sex differences.

Confining attention to sex differences among male and female offenders should produce larger sex differences on a scale since males report significantly higher means and proportions. Analyses of variance were completed on all subscales for those engaging in at least one such offense. Surprisingly, these calculations do not change the general magnitude of sex differences. Male and female offenders engage in delinquent activity at roughly the same rate, although males are consistently higher. The major sex differences are due to the larger number of male offenders.

Significant Interactions. There are only two significant interaction effects, which suggests that sex differences in SRD and drug use obtain across the subgroups defined by age, ethnicity, social class, and place of residence. Since two out of the 40 interactions would be expected to attain the .05 level of significance by chance, and since these interactions form no coherent pattern, any conclusions drawn from them are at best tentative. Nevertheless, this is consistent with previous studies (Gold & Reimer, 1975; Hindelang, 1971) which also report few significant interactions. On the other hand, the interactions are interpretable from previous research. The significant sex by age interaction for public disorder crimes is attributable to greater male involvement, but the magnitude of this sex difference varies by age (see Table 5). There is a sharp increase in male involvement at age 15 versus a sharp increase at age 16 for females. Public disorder crimes such as drunkenness and marijuana use fall within Clark and Haurek's (1966) definition of adult crimes, crimes for which they also report increases with age.

Greater

involvement with age in public disorder crimes reflects the growing autonomy of the sample. The later increases in the involvement of girls may indicate longer parental restrictions on their autonomy.

The single sex by place of residence interaction involves drug use. Place of residence appears to have a uniform effect on males and female: urban males and females are involved in more drug use than their rural counterparts (see Table 5). Urban males are involved in substantially more drug use than urban females, but there is essentially no difference between the mean drug use of rural males and females. This finding coincides with Gold and Reimer's (1975) report on two earlier national surveys: they found lower levels of drug involvement among rural youth and little increase in drug use between 1967 and 1972. The lower and virtually identical rates of drug use of rural males and females in this current study provides more evidence of the stability of drug use in rural youth, in contrast to the large increases in drug use among urban youth.

Table 5
Significant Interactions from Two-Way Analysis of Variance

		<u>Public Disorder</u>						
		<u>Age</u>						
		11	12	13	14	15	16	17
<u>Sex</u>	Male	.87	8.53	6.24	18.23	39.50	25.09	30.27
	(N)	(111)	(120)	(138)	(150)	(141)	(129)	(124)
	Female	1.71	4.49	4.28	8.18	8.16	22.59	24.55
	(N)	(112)	(120)	(144)	(96)	(127)	(108)	(100)
		<u>Drug Use</u>						
		<u>Place of Residence</u>						
		Urban						Rural
<u>Sex</u>	Male	9.44						8.38
	(N)	(610)						(303)
	Female	8.73						8.36
	(N)	(547)						(206)

Sex Differences in High Frequency Offenders. As part of this investigation, sex differences at four specific ranges along the SRD frequency continuum were examined through a series of chi square contingency analyses (sex by four specific levels of delinquency) on total SRD and selected subscales. All the chi square analyses are highly significant ($p \leq .0001$ for illegal services and public disorder crimes, $p \leq .01$ for all others). The results of these analyses are displayed in Tables 6 and 7. They show more marked sex differences at the high end of the continuum. For example, on public disorder crimes, roughly equal proportions of males and females report the two lowest levels of delinquent behavior, 0-4 offenses and 5-29 offenses. In the next highest category, 30-54 offenses, the male proportion of offenders is approximately one-and-a-half times that of females. In the highest category, the male proportion is twice that of females. Similarly, the proportion of males and females reporting the lowest level of predatory crimes against property (0-4 offenses) is not very different, whereas the proportion of males involved at the highest level (55+ offenses) is five times that of girls. This analysis of proportions provides evidence of substantial sex differences in the distribution of high frequency offenders, as Clark and Haurek (1966) have observed.

Stability of Sex Differences

The stability of sex differences across time has been examined by Elliott (1978) through a comparison of the 1977 NYS data with Gold and Reimer's (1975) data from 1967 and 1972. The respondents in Gold's 1967 survey were 13-16 years old, so the comparisons across the three studies were restricted to this age range. Gold's data were converted into annual estimates from the

Table 6

Frequencies of Males and Females Reporting
Specific Levels of Delinquency

		<u>Number of Offenses</u>			
		0-4	5-29	30-54	55+
Predatory Crimes Against Persons	(M)	660	206	23	27
	(F)	725	75	4	6
Predatory Crimes Against Persons	(M)	599	243	41	33
	(F)	631	159	14	6
Illegal Services	(M)	872	33	4	7
	(F)	795	12	0	3
Public Disorder	(M)	664	146	40	66
	(F)	632	124	23	31
Status	(M)	568	220	67	61
	(F)	592	151	37	30

		0-24	25-49	50-199	200+
Total SRD	(M)	539	107	186	84
	(F)	584	94	95	37

Table 7

Sex Differences in Proportions of Males and Females
Reporting Specific Levels of Delinquency

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Chi Square(df=3)</u>	<u>Level of Significance</u>
Total SRD	44.03	***
Predatory Crimes Against Persons	84.67	***
Predatory Crimes Against Property	43.99	***
Illegal Services	12.49	**
Public Disorder	13.34	**
Status	26.13	***

* $p \leq .05$
 ** $p \leq .01$
 *** $p \leq .001$

three-year time frame originally used. Respondents in Gold's survey were asked if they had ever engaged in each behavior, and for detailed information about recent incidents. This necessitated comparisons across the the surveys which used percentages of those reporting one or more offenses in the past year. Percentages of males and females reporting one or more offenses for eight comparable items across the three survey years are presented in Table 8. The data generally show increases across time in the percentages of youth reporting each offense. Marijuana use, truancy, and alcohol use account for the most dramatic increases. Gold reported major increases in alcohol and marijuana use between his 1967 and 1972 surveys, increases which were repeated between his 1972 and the NYS 1977 survey. These increases are similar for males and females. Reports from representative samples of American adolescents, spanning a decade, thus indicate increased delinquent involvement on certain delinquent acts in males and females but stable sex differences in delinquency.

Table 8

Percentage Reporting One or More Offenses During Past Year
by Type of Offense, Sex, and Survey Year (13-16 Year Olds)

Offense	Total Sample			Males			Females		
	'67	'72	'77	'67	'72	'77	'67	'72	'77
Runaway	2.5	4.6	5.9	2.3	4.8	6.1	2.6	4.4	5.7
Gang Fight	16.3	14.0	12.2	22.4	18.1	16.1	8.7	9.0	7.6
Marijuana Use	.4	10.5	19.8	.2	9.6	21.5	.5	11.5	17.9
Concealed Weapon	.0	4.6	7.9	.0	7.7	12.7	.0	1.4	2.3
Auto Theft	3.3	2.6	6.1	4.9	3.6	8.8	1.3	1.7	2.9
Hit Parent	4.7	4.7	7.1	4.3	4.3	7.0	5.3	5.3	7.2
Skipped School	26.6	23.2	35.7	31.1	25.1	38.7	20.9	20.9	32.1
Alcohol Use	26.6	29.5	52.9	32.6	29.8	55.5	19.0	29.1	49.9

Discussion

This study assesses the nature, magnitude, and distribution of sex differences in delinquency among a national probability sample of American youth. Compared with earlier SRD measures, the measure employed in this study includes more of the entire range of delinquent acts, including serious and violent crimes. Thus the results provide a more generalizable and differentiated picture of delinquent behavior.

At the item level there is evidence of the broad range of sex differences in delinquent behavior. Significantly greater male involvement in numerous delinquent acts is reflected in two ways: (1) higher mean frequencies (mean estimates), and (2) greater numbers of male offenders (proportion estimates). Greater male involvement extends to property and violent crimes. However, there is no support for greater female involvement (means or proportions) in traditionally female crimes. This lends credence to the position that higher female arrest rates on sex and home offenses such as prostitution and runaway indicate more stringent social sanctions against commission of these behaviors by girls (Chesney-Lind, 1973, 1974; Crites, 1976; Haskell & Yablonsky, 1970; Roberts, 1971; Smart, 1976; Steffensmeier & Steffensmeier, 1980).

Despite evidence for greater male involvement in many delinquent behaviors, the patterns of male and female delinquency are quite similar. This finding coincides with reports from other SRD studies, in contrast to the more sex-typed picture of male and female delinquency presented in official statistics. For example, although males are involved in significantly more violent offenses, the ratio is far from the 8:1 male/female ratio in violent crimes reported by UCR for youth under 18 for 1976 (U.S. Department of

Justice, 1977b). The mean estimates for items (admittedly different from the total number of offenses reported in UCR) show a 6:1 ratio for aggravated assault, a 2:1 ratio on sexual assault (forcible rape), and a 2:1 ratio on strong-arming others (robbery). Since many of the NYS items include attempted as well as completed acts, they should provide higher estimates of delinquent involvement than those reported in official statistics.

The major findings at the scale level include:

- (1) sex differences in overall delinquency and drug use; on the average, boys report twice as many acts as girls;
- (2) small but consistent sex differences in most subtypes of delinquent behavior, with the exception of illegal service crimes, hard drug use, and home delinquency;
- (3) sex differences due both to larger numbers of male offenders and to differences in male and female rates of involvement;
- (4) large sex differences in the proportion of high frequency offenders;
- (5) few interaction effects of sex with other demographic variables;
- (6) stability of sex differences and the distribution of offenses within sex across a decade.

Findings at the scale level corroborate findings of earlier SRD studies. Statistically reliable but small sex differences in mean involvement are observed on total SRD and most subscales. Aside from total SRD, the biggest sex difference is obtained on predatory crimes against persons, supporting the view that males are disproportionately involved in violent crimes. On the other hand, the finding on home delinquency refutes the notion that female delinquency is home-related. In fact, no discernible specialized pattern of delinquent involvement characterizes females in our sample.

The data indicate a significant difference in drug use (because of the item on alcohol), but no difference in hard drug use. Specifically, boys in our sample report more alcohol use ($p < .001$) but no greater use of marijuana or any hard drug. These comparable patterns of substance abuse in males and females are in line with the findings of earlier studies (Hindelang, 1971; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1975; Weschler & McFadden, 1976).

Sex differences are a function of the larger number of male offenders and higher offense frequencies in males. Among offenders, males and females report similar rates of offenses, although males are consistently higher. While there are only small differences in mean frequencies overall, there are more marked differences at the high end of the frequency continuum. The use of exact frequencies makes it possible to locate the point of greatest sex differences systematically. Sex differences in the proportion of high frequency offenders is a pattern particularly characteristic of predatory crimes against persons, predatory crimes against property, and total SRD. This pattern suggests that, in general, there are no sizable sex differences in average involvement of male and female offenders on most types of crime. However, there are significantly more high frequency male, as compared with female, offenders.

The distribution of scores suggests similar patterns and rates of male and female delinquency. The consistency of these effects across types of delinquency and across the subgroups of varying age, ethnicity, social class, and place of residence (i.e., the virtual absence of interaction effects) emphasizes the importance of sex as a determinant of delinquent behavior.

Reports of steadily accelerating increases in female relative to male crime across all types of crime (Adler, 1975; Datesman et al., 1975) or

particularly in property crime (Crites, 1976; Roberts, 1971), along with reports of decreases in female crime relative to males (Simon, 1979), provide a confusing picture of the changing nature of sex differences. Recent analyses of official arrest data for juveniles between 1965 and 1977 (Steffensmeier & Steffensmeier, 1980) indicate increases for both sexes in alcohol and drug use but indicate overall stability in the differential arrest rates of males and females. The comparison of the NYS data with Gold and Reimer's (1975) data from 1967 and 1972 furnishes additional evidence of the unchanging nature of sex differences in delinquency. These findings are consistent with Steffensmeier and Steffensmeier's (1980) official data and Gold and Reimer's self-report data. Delinquent behavior increased, particularly drug and alcohol use, between 1972 and 1977, but the increases were similar for males and females. This comparison of a limited set of delinquent behaviors suggests that sex differences in delinquent behavior have remained stable across the decade from 1967 to 1977.

In sum, the current study provides important new findings on the epidemiology of self-report delinquency in American youth. The findings indicate the pervasiveness of sex differences in delinquency (spanning many specific delinquent acts and most general categories of delinquent behavior), the small magnitude of these differences, and the similarity of patterns and rates of behavior among male and female offenders. Since the data are based on a national probability sample of youth and a comprehensive measure of delinquent behavior, they offer a broad and current assessment of the nature, magnitude, and distribution of self-report delinquency in American youth.

Footnotes

- 1 Recent papers by Steffensmeier (1980) and Steffensmeier and Steffensmeier (1980) present reanalyses of official data which indicate more similar male and female patterns, in line with findings from SRD studies.

- 2 For a more extensive discussion of these issues, see Ageton and Elliott (1978); Clark and Haurek (1966); Clark and Tifft (1966); Cohen and Short (1961); Elliott and Voss (1974); Empey (1978); Erickson and Empey (1963); Farrington (1973); Garofalo and Hindelang (1971); Gibbons (1973); Gold (1966, 1970); Hardt and Hardt (1977); Hindelang (1978); Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1975, 1978); Kitsuse and Cicourel (1963); Nettler (1974); United States Department of Justice (1977a); Voss (1963); and Williams and Gold (1972).

- 3 At each stage, probabilities of selection were proportionate to population totals, providing a self-weighting sample. In the first stage of sampling, 76 primary sampling units (PSUs) were selected. A PSU is a Standard Metropolitan Sampling Area (SMSA) or a county or group of contiguous counties containing a minimum of 5000 households. Within each of the 76 PSUs, progressively smaller geographical areas were selected, resulting in a list of 67,266 households, of which approximately 8000 were selected for inclusion in the sample. The selected households generated 2375 youth in the eligible (11-17) age range. The non-response rate in the first year was approximately 27% (649 respondents), due to parent or youth refusal, or judgments about the inappropriateness of the youth for

inclusion (e.g., severe mental retardation). Initial comparisons of the NYS sample with updated Census Bureau figures suggest that the sample is representative of the adolescent population with respect to age, sex, and ethnicity. For a detailed description of the sample, see Huizinga (1978) and Ageton and Elliott (1978).

- 4 For a more detailed discussion of the criticisms of SRD measures and the advantages of the current measures, see Elliott and Ageton (1979).
- 5 Respondents were asked to report the exact number of times they had engaged in each behavior, with the exception of the drug items where they were asked to select one of the following categorical responses: (1) once a month; (2) once every 2-3 weeks; (3) once a week; (4) 2-3 times a week; (5) once a day; or (6) 2-3 times a day. Derived frequency estimates were obtained for drug items by using the mean frequency for each category.
- 6 See Elliott and Ageton (1978) for a more complete discussion of the original and revised versions of this offense typology.
- 7 Information on confidence intervals for mean and proportion estimates as well as the average design effects for these estimates are available in Ageton and Elliott (1978).

8 The rank order correlation coefficient was calculated by rank-ordering the 40 SRD items by mean frequency separately for males and females and applying the Spearman equation. Ties in mean frequencies were broken by a random process.

9 While place of residence categories are referred to as "urban" or "rural" in the text, these designations are crude approximations of the SMSA-nonSMSA categories actually used. SMSA is a Census label for metropolitan areas, nonSMSA refers to nonmetropolitan areas.

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Program Proposal Cover Sheet

1980 APA ANNUAL CONVENTION

1. Type of Program: Symposium
2. Title of Program: Sex Differences in Delinquency
3. Chairperson of Session: Rachelle J. Canter

Affiliation: Behavioral Research Institute

Complete Mailing Address: 2305 Canyon Boulevard

Boulder, Colorado 80302

The chairperson is an APA member: Yes

4. Participants: see attached list
5. Discussants: see attached list
6. Length of time requested on program: 1 hour 50 minutes
7. Name and address of person submitting proposal:

Rachelle J. Canter, Ph.D.

Research Associate

Behavioral Research Institute

Boulder, Colorado 80302

Are you an APA member: Yes

I hereby certify that this proposal has not been submitted to any other division in APA and that all participants named have agreed in writing to participate.

Rachelle J. Canter
Signature

January 18, 1980

Date

Enclosure checklist:

- program proposal cover sheet
- five copies of 300-word general statement
- five copies of 300-word summary for each participant
- two self-addressed stamped envelopes

Participants

Rachelle J. Canter, Chair
Behavioral Research Institute
2305 Canyon Boulevard
Boulder, CO 80302

Presentation: "Correlates of Male and Female Delinquency"

Darrell J. Steffensmeier and Emilie Al-Khazraji
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Presentation: "An Inventory of Findings on Self-Reported
Female Delinquency"

Kathie S. Teilmann and Pierre Landry
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1042 W. 36th Place
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Presentation: "Gender Bias in Juvenile Justice"

D. Wayne Osgood and Hart F. Weichselbaum, and Franklyn W. Dunford
Behavioral Research Institute
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Presentation: "Gender Differences in Juvenile Offender Diversion"

Joseph Weis, Director
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Seattle, WA 98105

Discussant

Program Summary

Sex Differences in Delinquency

The relative dearth of information on sex differences in delinquency may reflect Haskell and Yablonsky's assertion in *Crime and Delinquency* (1970) that "Juvenile delinquency is essentially a problem of boys." In recent years, this assumption has been seriously challenged, particularly by the findings of studies using self-report measures of delinquency. These studies suggest that males are involved in more delinquent behavior than females, but that the magnitude of this difference is far smaller than originally indicated by official statistics. In addition, self-report delinquency studies report similar patterns of delinquent behavior. These divergent conclusions underline the need for research which addresses the issue of the effects of gender on delinquent behavior.

Such a major research question embraces a variety of issues. The presentations in this symposium represent four approaches to this research question; all are based on large, representative samples and sound research designs:

- (1) An examination of differential correlates of male and female delinquency, covering both demographic and psychological variables.
- (2) A review of findings concerning female delinquency from studies using self-report measures.
- (3) A study of the justice system's use of status charges for boys and girls.
- (4) An investigation of the role of gender in client selection, service delivery, and program impact for juvenile offender diversion programs.

Not only do these presentations cover the degree and sources of sex differences in delinquent behavior, but also the societal response to illegal behavior by males and females. Such a combination of topics should provide a fertile ground for discussion of the implications of research in this area for public policy and criminological theory.

Correlates of Male and Female Delinquency

In recent years, increased attention has been paid to the long neglected issue of sex differences in delinquent behavior. Studies using official measures such as arrest statistics report much more delinquency among males than females and distinct patterns of delinquency for each sex. Male involvement is concentrated in property and violent offenses, whereas female involvement centers around sex and home related offenses.

Studies using self-report delinquency (SRD) measures present a divergent picture. While they report higher male involvement, this sex difference in volume is much smaller than that observed in official statistics. Moreover, it is overshadowed by the similarity in patterns of delinquent behavior reported by males and females.

This paper will address some of the issues raised by this controversy. The data are based on a national probability sample of 1726 youth, ages 11-17, and use a self-report measure of delinquent behavior. The theoretical background for the study views delinquent behavior as the outcome of differential bonding processes. Bonds include affective commitments to the moral order as well as involvements in conventional roles and activities. The paper will focus on the following issues:

- (1) the nature, pattern and magnitude of sex differences in self-reported delinquent behavior--we observed consistent and sizeable sex differences (males reporting more offenses than females) for total SRD and most sub-categories of delinquent behavior; only two interactions of sex with other demographic variables (place of residence, age, social class, and ethnicity) suggesting the generality of the effect of sex across subgroups; and an overall ratio of 2:1 male-to-female acts;

- (2) an explanation of these differences in terms of demographic and theoretically-relevant psychological correlates such as attitudes toward deviance and exposure to delinquent peers;
- (3) tests of possible sex differences in the correlates of delinquency in adolescent males and females.

An Inventory of Findings on Self-Reported Female Delinquency

Abstract

This report presents an inventory of findings on self reported female delinquency. More than 25 self report studies are reviewed and evaluated as to their information on female delinquency in regard to its extent, specialization, group variations, etiology, and trends. Throughout, patterns of female delinquency are examined relative to those of male delinquency.

The authors offer a critical view of self report studies, maintaining that most are characterized by serious sampling and measurement shortcomings. These, along with the trivialness of the delinquencies surveyed, leave the authors to conclude that delinquency researchers (especially those doing self report studies) tend to exaggerate the usefulness of self report vis a vis official data as a measure of delinquency.

The most clear cut finding to emerge from the self report studies, and a finding reflected in official data as well, is that sex differences in delinquency have remained generally stable over at least the past two decades.

Gender Bias in Juvenile Justice

A current major issue in Juvenile Justice is the question of discrimination against females in processing by agents of the justice system. A particular target is female status offenders, who are said to be treated more harshly than male status offenders. This study uses data sets from eight locations across the country to assess the accuracy of this assertion, using controls on offense and prior record. The results indicate bias against girls for some offenses and against boys for others. However the pattern varies widely across sites with little consistency. While status offenders are consistently given harsher treatment than delinquent offenders, this is as true for boys as for girls. There is some evidence that girls are arrested for status offenses at a higher rate than are boys when contrasted with their self reported delinquency rates. Given the relatively even-handed treatment both genders seem to receive once in the system, the role of their parents in bringing about status offense arrest deserves more attention in future research.

Gender Differences in Juvenile Offender Diversion

Previous research has demonstrated that an offender's sex can be important in determining the juvenile justice system's response to his or her illegal behavior. This paper examines the role of gender in one alternative available to the justice system--diversion to a community based service agency. Diversion programs have become an integral part of justice systems throughout the country, perhaps as pervasive as probation. The findings to be presented come from a national evaluation of diversion programs which encompassed eleven programs that served 5000 youths in nine communities. Four of the programs randomly assigned 1800 youths to treatment and control groups. The paper will focus on the role of gender in three aspects of diversion: client selection, service delivery, and program impact.

Males and females referred to the diversion programs will be compared for sex biases in the selection of clients. Females comprise fifteen percent of the combined client populations, which is somewhat lower than the percent of females among juvenile arrests in the most recent Uniform Crime Reports. We will determine the degree and source of under or over representation of females by comparing presenting offenses and prior offense histories for males and females in the programs' client populations and in the communities' total juvenile arrest populations. We will also examine gender differences in social adjustment, labeling, and self reported delinquency at the time of referral.

Because the vast majority of clients at all eleven programs are male, there exists a strong possibility that the programs are ill prepared to deliver services to female clients. Service delivery will be examined in terms of client loss rates, the types of service rendered and the amount of service rendered.

The final topic of the paper will be gender differences in the impact of diversion on youth. Randomly assigned youths were interviewed at three points in time to assess labeling, social adjustment, and self reported delinquency. The study also includes police and court records of arrests. All these measures will be examined for any differential impact by the programs between males and females. Measures of prior offense history and of service delivery will be included in the analysis to determine the sources of gender differences in impact.

END