

5-15-1979

Sex Differences in Delinquency: An Analysis of Juvenile Court Statistics, 1970-76

Darrell J. Steffensmeier

John H. Kramer

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/plr>



Part of the [Juveniles Commons](#), and the [Women Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Darrell J. Steffensmeier and John H. Kramer *Sex Differences in Delinquency: An Analysis of Juvenile Court Statistics, 1970-76*, 6 Pepp. L. Rev. 3 (1979)

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/plr/vol6/iss3/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Law at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pepperdine Law Review by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact Kevin.Miller3@pepperdine.edu.

Sex Differences in Delinquency: An Analysis of Juvenile Court Statistics, 1970-76

DARRELL J. STEFFENSMEIER*
JOHN H. KRAMER**

It is the purpose of this report to examine some current conceptions of trends in female delinquency, by the use of juvenile court statistics of a large eastern state (Pennsylvania) for the time period of 1970-76. These years are used because the collection of court statistics on a statewide basis was initiated in 1970 and because 1976 is the last year comparable data was available, due to changes in reporting procedures introduced in 1977.

The relatively short time span of six years creates less of a disadvantage in assessing trends than ordinarily would be the case, since the alleged effects of the contemporary Women's Movement on female delinquency should be most evident in the 1970's. Substantial participation of women in specific feminist activities did

* B.A., St. Ambrose College, 1964; M.A., University of Iowa, 1970; Ph.D., University of Iowa, 1972; Assistant Professor of Sociology, North Carolina State University, 1971-75; Assistant Professor of Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University, 1975 to present.

** B.A., Ohio State University, 1966; M.A., University of Iowa, 1975; Ph.D., University of Iowa, 1975; Assistant Professor of Sociology at Markato State College, 1971-73; Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, The Pennsylvania State University, 1973 to present.

not occur until the late 1960's and early 1970's,¹ making the past five or six years seem particularly crucial for assessing the link between women's liberation and female crime.

In addition to presenting data of female delinquency from the courts of this one state, national juvenile court statistics as well as other sources of evidence covering this period of the 1970's are briefly discussed for purposes of comparison and interpretation. Although national juvenile court statistics are more representative of the United States as a whole, they are less useful in other respects. The national data, for example, are broken down by sex, but do not identify the race of the delinquent nor the types of offenses for which adolescents are referred to juvenile court. In contrast, the Pennsylvania data are broken down by sex and race individually and in combination; and the data also identify the types of offenses for which juveniles are referred to the courts. Thus, the court data from this one state permit a more systematic analysis than that possible by way of national juvenile court statistics.

I. BACKGROUND

Since at least the turn of the century many social scientists, lawyers, and members of the media have worried about the impact of women's emancipation on female criminality. Currently, there is a renewed interest in the relationship between women's status and crime, with apparent increases and shifts in female crime being linked to changing sex roles and the contemporary Women's Movement. The criminal activities of women are supposedly becoming similar to men in kind and degree as convergence in role expectations and access to greater opportunities for illegal activity increases, particularly as these relate to greater female assertiveness and the relatively more liberated position of today's female.² In the opinion of one author, women's participation in crime has been increasing and will continue to do so as "her employment opportunities expand and as her interests, desires, and definitions of self shift from a more traditional to a more liberated view."³

This perspective has been sold in the mass media, embraced by feminists, legitimated by many criminologists, and supported by

1. Freeman, *The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement*, 78 AM. J. OF SOC. 792 (1973).

2. F. Adler, *SISTERS IN CRIME* (1975); Widom, *Toward An Understanding of the Female Sex Role: The Family Court and the Female Delinquent*, 8 ISSUES IN CRIMINOLOGY 51 (1973).

3. Simon, *The Contemporary Women and Crime*, NAT'L. INST. OF MENTAL HEALTH (1975).

some control agents. It is widely believed that "permanent changes are occurring in the lawbreaking endeavors of American women,"⁴ with the most dramatic increases occurring in serious and traditionally masculine kinds of crime. As one observer put it, there has been a "skyrocketing increase in the rate at which women steal cars, burglarize stores, forge checks, embezzle funds. . . ."⁵ Females "are now being found not only robbing banks singlehandedly, but also committing assorted armed robberies, muggings, loan-sharking operations, extortion, murders, and a wide variety of other aggressive, violence-oriented crimes which previously involved only men."⁶ Even more forcefully, former Chief Ed Davis of the Los Angeles Police Department believes that the women's movement has triggered "a crime wave like the world has never seen before."⁷

More crucial still is that the future promises "more of the same" since in the area of crime, at least, there does not appear to be a "generation gap." "If the adult arrest rates say anything about what is happening now, the crime rates for persons under eighteen say something perhaps even more about the women of the future."⁸ And elsewhere, "[s]ince delinquent activity, like its adult counterpart, is linked to opportunity and expectation, there is every reason to anticipate that, as egalitarian forces expand, so too will the crime rates of the young female set."⁹

Similar views run through most recent work on female delinquency: the emancipation of women in our society over the past decade and a half has decreased the differences in criminality not only between men and women but also between boys and girls.¹⁰

4. D. GIBBONS, *SOCIETY, CRIME AND CRIMINAL CAREERS* (3d ed. 1977).

5. F. ADLER, *SISTERS IN CRIME* at 250 (1975).

6. *Id.* at 14.

7. While these claims appear widely accepted, the writers' interviews with law enforcement officials, perhaps those most in a position to know, reveal them to be skeptical about claims of rising female crime. Nonetheless, even among this group there obviously is some highly publicized acceptance of such claims. Findings similar to ours are reported, yet rejected, by Adler, who observes that:

[C]ountless prison administrators, police officials, and other law-enforcement authorities who believe that the women's liberation movement is in no way connected to the sharply rising crime rate of women in America. *Indeed, many of them won't admit that such a female crime wave even exists, but also that it is growing at an alarming rate.*

Id. at 8 (emphasis added).

8. *Id.* at 17.

9. *Id.* at 94.

10. Rasche, *The Female Offender as an Object of Criminological Research*, 1

It is the purpose of this report, therefore, to examine trends in female delinquency relative to male delinquency, using Pennsylvania court statistics covering the time period of 1970-76. The pattern of delinquency trends as revealed in these statistics are also compared to trends as reflected in national juvenile court and arrest statistics. The authors conclude from this analysis that female delinquency has changed very little in recent years, but rather continues to reflect traditional sex roles. The article concludes by suggesting alternative views regarding the effects of changing sex roles and the Women's Movement on female delinquency.

II. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data used in this investigation consist of delinquency cases referred to county juvenile courts in Pennsylvania for the years of 1970 and 1976. Excluded from the analysis are twenty-one counties which changed reporting forms during 1976 and thereby reduced the comparability of their data with the remainder of the state. Still, the analysis consists of referrals in forty-six counties which comprise approximately ninety percent of all referrals in the state. The data were made available by the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, which serves as a centralized repository for county juvenile court statistics.

Most students of crime who use court statistics preface their analysis with a few words of caution about the reliability and validity of these statistics. The authors too are aware of the vulnerability of these data to measurement errors. Nonetheless, if one can assume a random distribution of measurement error between the sexes, then one is reasonably safe in using these data for purposes of examining the relative differences in delinquency rates between males and females over a given period of time. For example, changes in legal definitions of offenses, in organizational changes within court systems and in citizen expectations, are error factors which generally will be randomly distributed between the sexes over time.¹¹ It is risky, however, to use the court data as either a measure of incidence of female delinquency in a specific year, or to use the data to assess changes in delinquency levels for females over time. In short, the court data are reasonably appropriate for making trend comparisons between the

CRIM. JUST. AND BEHAVIOR 306 (1974); Kvatcoski, *Changing Patterns in the Delinquent Activities of Boys and Girls: A Self-Reported Delinquency Analysis*, 10 ADOLESCENCE 83 (1975).

11. See Skogan, *The Validity of Official Crime Statistics: An Empirical Investigation*, 55 SOC. SCIENCE Q. 25 (1974); Steffensmeier & Jordan, *Changing Patterns of Female Crime in Rural America*, 43 RURAL SOC. 87 (1978).

sexes—an intersex comparison—but not for looking at each sex separately—an intrasex comparison.

These considerations present few limitations in terms of the present analysis. After all, in any discussion of changing sex roles and its relation to female delinquency, the central issue is whether sex differences in delinquency diminish as females become more assertive and as boys and girls move toward greater equality in their rights and privileges. Related to this is the question of whether the Women's Movement has been a determinant of changes in female delinquency. These questions are more significant theoretically than questions about whether delinquent girls today are different than delinquent girls of a decade or so ago.

To determine if female delinquency is rising relative to that of males, the authors calculated the proportion of court referrals which are females. This is done for each of the offense categories listed in the court statistics, and also is done for the summary total of all court referrals. The use of proportions or percents as measure of the *sex differential* is preferred to that of percentage change or ratio measures of change. The latter are derived from a part-to-part rather than a part-to-whole comparison and are quite unstable when the base is small. In this regard, large differences between the sexes in base rates of court referrals present major difficulties in analyzing changes over time. Since female delinquency levels are much lower initially than male levels, small changes in the volume of females referred to court tend to be exaggerated by percentage or ratio change statistics, thereby artificially inflating female gains or losses. Proportions help in part to overcome this unequal base rate problem.

Additional analysis are performed to more closely examine changes in the distribution of offenses committed and to determine if the profile of the female delinquent has been changing. Mainly, this consists of examining whether changes have occurred in the proportion of adolescent males and females referred to court for specific kinds of crimes, particularly whether female gains have occurred in serious, violent, or what has been considered masculine types of delinquencies.

III. FINDINGS

The general direction in which juvenile court referrals have

been moving since 1970 is reflected in Table 1 which displays sex and sex-race specific tabulations for fifteen categories for the years 1970 and 1976. The patterns are generally similar among white and black youth; in large part the findings are discussed without making sex-race distinctions. Female referrals rose in some categories but declined in others: the increases, usually

Table 1. Sex Differential in Juvenile Court Referrals by Offense, 1970-76¹²

Offense Category	Sex Differential					
	All Adolescents		Whites		Blacks	
	1970	1976	1970	1976	1970	1976
<i>Murder/ Manslaughter</i>	2.1 (3/141)	3.3 (1/29)	13.3 (2/13)	5.5 (1/17)	.7 (1/129)	0.0 (0/12)
<i>Robbery</i>	3.3 57/1673	4.0 73/1760	2.5 5/196	6.6 20/283	3.4 52/1477	3.5 53/1477
<i>Assault</i>	16.6 (546/3296)	18.2 (681/3732)	12.5 (133/1066)	15.5 (248/1603)	18.5 (413/2230)	20.3 (433/2129)
<i>Burglary</i>	2.9 127/4317	3.1 162/5136	2.6 53/2004	3.3 100/2934	3.1 74/2313	2.7 62/2202
<i>Larceny</i>	5.1 106/1960	7.3 279/3563	4.1 45/1058	8.0 162/1864	6.3 61/902	6.4 117/1699
<i>Shoplifting</i>	47.8 672/733	42.2 597/817	45.0 263/321	50.3 177/175	49.8 409/412	39.5 420/642
<i>Auto Theft</i>	3.4 98/2798	5.2 89/1631	4.4 55/1184	6.7 61/853	2.6 43/1614	3.5 28/778
<i>Weapons</i>	2.2 18/788	5.0 39/738	4.0 5/121	3.9 10/248	1.9 13/667	5.6 29/490
<i>Vandalism</i>	7.5 130/1593	9.7 121/1127	6.1 63/976	7.3 56/715	9.8 67/617	13.6 65/412
<i>Drugs</i>	15.0 278/1579	13.5 316/2022	16.0 247/1297	15.6 252/1372	9.9 31/282	9.0 64/650
<i>Drunkenness</i>	13.9 384/2380	16.4 192/982	12.8 192/1313	15.5 118/645	15.2 192/1067	18.0 74/337
<i>Liquor Poss.</i>	19.8 124/503	24.5 92/283	20.4 116/454	27.6 88/231	14.0 8/49	7.1 4/52
<i>Running Away</i>	56.6 1252/960	57.0 1224/924	55.9 757/597	63.1 685/401	57.7 495/363	50.8 539/523
<i>Ungovernable</i>	45.2 816/991	48.2 529/569	39.8 441/666	46.2 326/379	53.6 375/325	51.7 203/190
<i>Truancy</i>	32.2 279/588	29.1 76/185	32.3 181/380	39.1 70/109	32.0 98/208	50.0 6/6
<i>Total</i>	16.8 (4890/24300)	16.0 (4471/23498)	18.0 (2558/11646)	16.7 (2374/11829)	15.6 (2332/12655)	15.3 (2097/11599)

* In parenthesis is the number of court referrals, with the female number given first.

** Combines aggravated assault and other assaults.

*** Includes curfew violations.

12. The statistics pertaining to the sex differential in juvenile court referrals were compiled by the authors, Steffensmeier and Kramer.

small, were in the categories of robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, weapons, and drugs; the decreases, also usually small, were in the categories of murder/manslaughter, auto theft, shoplifting, vandalism, drunkenness, running away, truancy, ungovernability, and liquor possession. Taken together, the total number of female referrals declined slightly from 1970 to 1976.

Juvenile court referrals of adolescent males show a pattern of change similar to that of females, the exceptions being a small increase in referrals for shoplifting and a small decline in referrals for weapons. The total number of males referred to juvenile court also declined slightly from 1970 to 1976.

The changes from category to category may reflect shifts over time in public attitudes and official policy more than actual behavior of adolescents, either male or female. The rise in referral for serious delinquencies (*e.g.*, assault) and the decline in referrals for status offenses appears to reflect a combination of changes in the state Penal Code, in juvenile court philosophy, and in school policy. First, there have been changes in the state Penal Code wherein (a) local agencies are given discretion to treat runaways and related offenders as "dependent" children rather than as delinquents, with only the latter tabulated in delinquency statistics; and (b) reclassification of shoplifting whereby the first offense is defined as a summary offense and the second offense as a misdemeanor.¹³ The effect of this change is that in large part only shoplifting "repeaters" are referred to juvenile court. Second, there appears to be an emerging philosophy in Pennsylvania that the juvenile court should concentrate its efforts less on petty offenders, but instead on youth involved in serious delinquencies. Third, related to this, there appear to be changes in school policy and community expectations whereby truancy and curfew cases are less likely to be referred to juvenile court.

The most important result emerging from our comparison of delinquent behavior among boys and girls referred to juvenile court from 1970 to 1976 is not that the amount of delinquency had changed but that the style had changed. Both boys and girls were

13. Pursuant to changes in Pennsylvania's penal code in 1972, offenses are now classified as *summary* offenses, *misdemeanor* offenses, and *felony* offenses. The changes in 1972 reclassified many misdemeanors, 18 PA. CONS. STAT. ANN. § 106 (Purdon Supp. 1978). Under the present code, summary offenses would be classified as misdemeanors in most other states and some misdemeanors would be listed as felonies.

being referred to court in 1976 for more serious delinquencies and less for status offenses. Again, these changes appear due to modifications in legal and official policies rather than in the behaviors of male and female adolescents.

A. Male/Female Delinquency Trends

In any discussion of changing sex roles and its relation to female delinquency, the central issue is whether sex differences in delinquency diminish as females become more assertive and as boys and girls move toward greater equality in their rights and privileges. Another related question is whether the contemporary Women's Movement has been (or is likely to be) a determinant of changes in female delinquency.

Male and female court referrals are compared in Table 1 in the columns marked SD for sex differential, defined as the percentage of court referrals within each offense category that are female. Comparisons of SD for the years of 1970 and 1976 are provided for the total group of adolescents and for the subgroups of whites and blacks. Since trends in SD are similar among whites and blacks, our results are discussed in terms of adolescents as a whole.¹⁴

As shown in Table 1, the sex differential in court referrals of adolescent males and females generally has held stable over the past six years. Females did make gains in more categories than did males but the size of the gains and losses is so small that none of the changes can be considered as very significant. The smaller base rate of females, sampling fluctuations, and changes in enforcement policies would lead us to expect some variation in the SD over time. For example, the largest female gain was in the category of shoplifting where the SD decreased from 47.8 to 42.2. This gain probably reflects a policy change in which first-time shoplifters and shoplifters without a prior record are less likely to be referred to juvenile court. Since females are less likely to have prior records or extensive criminal careers, this policy change would tend to decrease their chances relative to males of referral to juvenile court if caught shoplifting.

It is also apparent from Table 1 that, relative to males, female involvement continues to remain high in the traditional female delinquencies of shoplifting and in the status offenses of running away, curfew violation, ungovernability, and truancy. As detailed

14. The only exceptions to the parallel patterns among black and white youth were in shoplifting, running away, and liquor possession, where white females made small gains on white males while the sex differential among blacks widened slightly; and in weapons where black females made small gains over black males while among whites the sex differential widened.

below, this suggests that the character of female delinquency has not undergone much change in recent years.

B. Trends in Court Referrals by Type of Delinquency

So far we have examined referrals for each individual offense category, but a farther-reaching approach in portraying trends is to group the categories by type and then total the tabulations for each type of delinquency. To evaluate popular and scientific claims that adolescent females are increasingly engaging in delinquent behaviors that have been traditionally the province of males, the authors have chosen to categorize the offenses into six types: *serious, violent, masculine, property, drugs/drinking, and status offenses*.

The offense categories operationally defined as serious, violent, and masculine are listed in Table 2. Note that there is overlap in the listing and, therefore, our interpretation of changes in these types of offenses are similar.

The offenses defined as *serious* include the Index or Type I offenses of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports—murder, assault (aggravated and other assaults),¹⁵ robbery, burglary, shoplifting/larceny, and auto theft. As Table 2 shows, the sex differential is essentially unchanged over this time period, from 10.1 in 1970 to 10.5 in 1976. Table 2 also shows the percent court referrals for serious crimes comprised of total male and total female referrals. The moderate increases in referrals for serious crimes is similar for both sexes: a seven percent increase for females and a nine percent increase for males. This pattern reflects the increased concern of juvenile courts in Pennsylvania to handle the more serious delinquency cases.

For the three offenses defined as *violent*—murder, assault, and weapons—the sex differential is relatively unchanged: 13.3 in 1970 and 15.9 in 1976. Also, for both sexes, there is a small increase in the percent of total court referrals accounted for by violent offenses. The evidence is weak, therefore, that female adolescents have gained ground on males in the commission of violent crimes.

15. There has always been considerable ambiguity concerning whether an "assault" incident is to be listed in the category of aggravated assault or in the category of other assaults. Penal code changes in 1972 resulted in many aggravated assaults now being classified as other assaults. See note 13 *supra*. For this reason, and for purposes of trend analysis, we have grouped together court referrals for aggravated and other assaults.

Table 2. Sex Differential (SD) and Percent of Total Referrals for Serious, Violent, Masculine, Property, Drugs/Drinking and Status Types of Delinquency, 1970 and 1976.¹⁶

	Number		SD	% of Male Total	% of Female Total
	M	F			
<i>Serious</i>					
1970	14372	1609	10.1	59.1	32.9
1976	15987	1882	10.5	68.0	42.1
<i>Violent</i>					
1970	3679	567	13.3	15.1	11.6
1976	3818	721	15.9	16.2	16.1
<i>Masculine</i>					
1970	12565	751	5.7	51.7	15.4
1976	12345	1045	7.8	52.5	23.4
<i>Property</i>					
1970	13074	1190	8.3	53.8	24.3
1976	14034	1321	8.6	59.7	29.5
<i>Drugs/Drinking</i>					
1970	4808	440	8.4	19.8	9.0
1976	3287	600	15.4	14.0	13.4
<i>Status</i>					
1970	3487	3160	47.5	14.3	64.6
1976	2228	2346	51.3	9.5	52.5

Serious delinquencies are: murder, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft.

Violent are: murder, assault, and weapons.

Masculine are: murder, assault, burglary, robbery, auto theft, and weapons.

Property are: robbery, burglary, auto theft, larceny, shoplifting, and vandalism.

Drugs/Drinking are: drug offenses, drunkenness, and liquor possession.

Status Offenses are: running away, ungovernable, and truancy.

As identified in the literature, *masculine* crimes require stereotyped male behavior, involve masculine skills and techniques and are usually committed by males. Commonly, they are defined as crimes involving physical strength and daring, elements of coercion and confrontation with the victim, and/or specialized skills.¹⁷ Six offenses have been categorized as masculine types of delinquencies: murder, assault, robbery, burglary, auto theft, and weapons. Table 2 shows that for masculine crimes, the sex differential changed very little from 1970-76 (from 5.7 to 7.8). There is, however, a greater increase for females than males in the percent

16. The statistics comprised in Table 2 were compiled by the authors, Steffensmeier and Kramer.

17. See Steffensmeier, *Trends in Female Delinquency*, to be printed in *CRIMINOLOGY* (1979) for a review of the relevant literature.

of total court referrals accounted for by masculine types of offenses: from 15.4 to 23.4 for females and from 51.7 to 52.5 for males. Closer inspection of the data reveals these female gains are due largely to more court referrals of females for other assaults. As will be discussed later, there is some evidence that female involvement in "other assaults" is relatively non-serious in nature and tends to consist of being bystanders or companions to males involved in skirmishes, fights, etc.¹⁸

An examination of trends in *property* types of crime—robbery, burglary, auto theft, shoplifting, larceny, and vandalism—reveals relatively little change in the sex differential: 8.3 in 1970 and 8.6 in 1976. Further, the percent of total arrest rates accounted for by property offenses increased similarly for both sexes, from 24.3 to 29.5 for females and from 53.8 to 59.7 for males.

It is only in the types of delinquencies that the authors have classified as drugs/drinking and status offenses that is found some greater degree of measurable change in the sex differential. The largest decrease in the sex differential occurs in the *drugs/drinking* types of offenses, from 8.4 in 1970 to 15.4 in 1976. Moreover, the percent of court referrals accounted for by drugs/drinking increased for females but decreased for males. This pattern is consistent with evidence from other sources; the latter indicate that the female gains are due to greater alcohol and marijuana use.¹⁹ As developed later, changes toward earlier (younger) and more frequent dating on the part of teenage girls helps explain the rise in drinking and use of drugs.

Regarding *status* offenses, Table 2 shows a small decrease in the sex differential, from 47.5 in 1970 to 51.3 in 1976. Females made gains relative to males in status offenses, even though status offenses accounted for a smaller percent of both male and female court referrals in 1976 than in 1970. This mixed data pattern does not produce a clear-cut conclusion, but does tend to reflect the continuing traditional nature of female delinquency. The literature on female delinquency has consistently suggested that female adolescents rarely deviated but when they did they com-

18. See M. KLEIN, *STREET GANGS AND STREET WORKERS* (1971); Miller, *Violence by Youth Gangs and Youth Groups as a Crime Problem in Major American Cities*, U.S. DEPT OF JUST. (1975); Norland, *Gender Roles and Female Criminality: Some Critical Comments*, 15 *CRIMINOLOGY* 67 (1977).

19. Gold & Reimer, *Changing Patterns of Delinquent Behavior Among Americans 13 Through 16 Years Old: 1967-72*, 7 *CRIME AND DELINQUENCY LITERATURE* 483 (1975).

mitted petty thefts (*e.g.*, shoplifting) or they tended to act out delinquencies “sexually”—that is, they more frequently violated female sex role expectations than criminal statutes.²⁰ In reference to our earlier discussion, it is clear that the movement of the juvenile court toward greater concern with serious juvenile offenders has come only so far. As in the past, teenage girls are being sent to juvenile court for minor acts of deviance (curfew, runaway, etc.) which may be viewed as a challenge to the authority of the family and the viability of the double standard for male offenders.

Taken together, the juvenile court data presented clearly indicates that female delinquency has changed very little over the past six years. In sum, no shift is apparent in the pattern of female delinquency after the appearance of the contemporary Women’s Movement and no support exists for the view that the “new” female delinquent represents “the shady side of liberation.” As some analysts are recognizing,²¹ the movement appears to have had a greater impact on changing the image of the female delinquent than the level or types of criminal activities that she is likely to commit.

C. Supporting Evidence

There is other evidence which also raises doubts about whether female delinquency in the 1970’s is increasing or changing more rapidly than that of males. First, national statistics on juvenile court referrals are available for each year 1970-75. Sex-specific rates per 100,000 were calculated to facilitate trend comparisons. As shown in Table 3, the rates per 100,000 have tended to rise in

Table 3. Juvenile Court Referral Rates²² per 100,000 Adolescents (ages 10-17), 1970-1975, and Sex Differential

	Male	Female	SD
1970	4809.0	1576.3	24.7
1971	5020.5	1722.8	25.6
1972	4879.7	1744.8	26.3
1973	4971.2	1822.3	26.8
1974	5452.0	1990.5	26.7
1975	6066.8	1944.2	24.2

20. C. VEDDER & D. SOMERVILLE, *THE DELINQUENT GIRL* (1970); Steffensmeier, *Trends in Female Delinquency*, to be printed in *CRIMINOLOGY* (1979).

21. *E.g.*, Klein & Kress, *A Critical Overview of Women, Crime and the Criminal Justice System*, 5 *CRIME AND SOCIAL JUSTICE* 34-39 (1976).

22. NAT’L. CENTER FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION, *JUVENILE COURT STATISTICS, 1975*, at 17, Table 9 (1977).

the 1970's for both sexes: for males, they were 4809.0 in 1970 and 6066.8 in 1975; while for females the rates were 1576.3 in 1970 and 1944.2 in 1975. Most importantly, a comparison of male and female rates reveals that the sex differential has held constant: 24.7 in 1970 and 24.2 in 1975.

Second, as reviewed elsewhere, national arrest statistics of the FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports* provide further documentation that sex differences in adolescent arrest rates have held generally stable during the 1970's.²³ Specifically, females have not been catching up with males in arrests for violent, masculine, or serious crimes. To the extent that there were female gains, these occurred in the traditional female offenses of larceny (*e.g.*, shoplifting), runaways, and liquor law violations.

Finally, self-report studies show that both male and female delinquency has held generally stable during the 1970's, with the exception that both sexes reported increased use of marijuana and alcoholic beverages.²⁴ However, female gains in drugs/drinking were greater than those of males—a pattern which is consistent with court statistics and arrest data.

IV. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The major aim of this study was to examine juvenile court statistics of the State of Pennsylvania to determine if sex differences in delinquency had diminished or changed during the 1970's. Data from other sources (*e.g.*, self report, national court and arrest statistics) also were examined to supplement the Pennsylvania data. The major findings were that sex differences in delinquency have remained generally stable during the 1970's. To the extent that they have occurred, the gains made by adolescent females reflect traditional sex roles. The increases in court referrals and in arrests of teenage girls were either in typically feminine types of crimes such as theft (*e.g.*, shoplifting) and runaways, or the increases were for offenses such as assaults, liquor law violations or use of drugs which are committed with males in heterosexual situations rather than in association with

23. Steffensmeier, *Trends in Female Delinquency*, to be printed in *CRIMINOLOGY* (1979); Terry, *Trends in Female Crime: A Comparison of Adler, Simon, and Steffensmeier* (paper presented at 1978 annual meeting of The Society for the Study of Social Problems, San Francisco, Ca.).

24. See Steffensmeier, *Trends in Female Delinquency*, to be printed in *CRIMINOLOGY* (1979) for review of self-report findings.

females, or alone. Gold and Reimer,²⁵ for example, provide evidence that female increase in drugs and drinking is due to earlier and more frequent dating and more casual cross-sex socializing. They state that females in the 1970's dated more frequently than girls in the 1960's and girls who were active daters were largely responsible for increases in drug usage and drinking among adolescent females. Gold and Reimer observe that:

[G]irls' use of drugs was much more dependent on their association with boys than boys' use was on their association with girls. Relatively few girls used drugs when there were no boys with them; the majority of boys' drug use was in the absence of girls. Furthermore, girls usually got their drugs from boys. It seems that more frequent drug use among girls was in part caused by what the boys they went with were doing more often. The girls went along.²⁶

This line of reasoning suggests that two counteracting social trends have had and may continue to have some impact on trends in female delinquency. On the one hand, changes in the independent, participant-run dating courtship system may *increase* the incidence of female delinquency while, on the other hand, the Women's Movement may *decrease* female delinquency.

For those girls who are most oriented toward marriage and housewife roles, the trend toward earlier and more frequent dating and the increased amount of casual socializing with the opposite sex increases the likelihood of females becoming involved in delinquent activities. Some authorities state these girls place greater emphasis on dating and therefore have greater contact with boys whose status symbols include cigarettes, cars, drinking, and rights of sexual access.²⁷ They state that these girls are more likely to be exposed to more favorable definitions for law violations, to more opportunities to commit delinquencies, and to more opportunities to be accomplices or bystanders to boys who commit delinquencies.

Another distinct but related delinquency pattern occurs for girls who lack the ability to attract boys because of physical appearance or social clumsiness. These girls may use sexual favors to acquire the attention of boys and thus fall into a pattern of promiscuity, status loss, aggravated promiscuity, further status loss and so on.²⁸ While these girls may eventually reject marriage and other conventional goals, initially they tend to have traditional

25. Gold & Reimer, *Changing Patterns of Delinquent Behavior Among Americans 13 through 16 Years Old 1967-72*, 7 CRIME AND DELINQUENCY LITERATURE 483 (1975).

26. *Id.* at 509.

27. A. STINCHCOMBE, *REBELLION IN HIGH SCHOOL* (1964).

28. D. GIBBONS, *DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR* (1970).

orientations.²⁹ These two patterns of delinquency are most likely to occur among lower or working class teenagers.

On the other hand, the Women's Movement may actually decrease the likelihood of female delinquency for some girls by reducing the emphasis upon the roles of wife and mother and by providing females with alternative sources of status and identity, other than those that are contingent upon their relationships with males. For those girls who embrace these newly emerging definitions, the likelihood of delinquency is probably reduced by means of decreased involvement in dating and decreased emphasis upon attractiveness to males. This is least likely to occur among lower class girls and most likely to occur among middle class girls, although dating and the emphasis upon marriage is still widespread throughout the social structure. Traditional sex role attitudes are still dominant and the female peer group continues to provide no viable image or identity for girls outside of definition through male relationships.³⁰ The research on female delinquency reveals that female gang members are either not aware of or attracted to the tenets of women's liberation but rather seek a status that is directly dependent on male members. Self-report studies of delinquency have found no association between liberated sex role ideology and female delinquency, and the researchers report having difficulty locating females holding liberated sex role attitudes or having masculine sex role expectations.³¹

Therefore, even though there is no way of knowing which of the social trends is more important, it seems likely that given the pervasiveness of the dating-courtship system, changes in it will have a greater effect on female delinquency than the Women's Movement. There is some evidence of a leveling off in trends toward earlier dating (pre-pubertal in many instances), non-chaperoned interaction between the sexes, and a weakening double standard of sexual behavior.³² The effects of this leveling off, to the extent

29. OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION, DEP'T. OF JUST., *LITTLE SISTERS AND THE LAW* (1977).

30. S. WEITZ, *SEX ROLES: BIOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS* (1977).

31. Giordano, *Changing Sex Roles and Females Involvement in Delinquency* (paper presented at the 1976 annual meeting of the Midwest Sociological Association, St. Louis, Mo.); Breeding & Norland, *Gender Roles and Patterns of Female and Male Delinquency* (paper presented at the 1977 annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society, Atlanta, Ga.).

32. P. GEBHARD, *SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR: 30 YEARS AFTER KINSEY* (1979).

it is occurring, would tend to limit increases in female delinquency.

Another factor that may have affected and may continue to affect trends in female delinquency, especially in theft categories, is increased economic and social strain on adolescents. Increases in illegitimacy and in teenagers as female heads of household³³ have pushed more young females into handling family finances and marketplace activities. Parenthetically, the increasing economic necessity of young females to support themselves and their offspring is greatest among lower class and minority females who are most likely to be referred to court or arrested, but who appear to be least affected by the ideology of the Women's Movement.

Finally, it has been observed how court statistics on delinquency trends of females may simply reflect changes in official policies more than changes in behaviors of adolescent females. Others have suggested that attitudinal changes and pressures for equal treatment of females may result in greater reporting of female delinquencies and more equal treatment of females. Regarding status offenses, however, equal treatment may actually lower delinquency rates of females since female adolescents tend to receive harsher, albeit more "protective," treatment for status and sex-related offenses but receive more lenient treatment for criminal offenses.³⁴ It remains to be seen whether, due to pressure from women's groups, court decisions, and so on, the sex disparity in handling of delinquents will diminish in the years ahead. Until this time it seems unlikely that these kind of changes have had much effect on official patterns of female delinquency relative to male delinquency. Females continue to be referred to court and arrested largely for traditionally female crimes such as petty theft, use of drugs and status offenses; in fact they have made their major gains in these offenses.

In sum, the facts that have been presented as well as the interpretation of the forces shaping female delinquency run contrary to much of the popular and scientific writing on the subject. Female delinquency has not changed much in recent years and continues to be largely an outgrowth of females responding to males. Further, it appears unlikely that female delinquency will undergo much change in the foreseeable future.

33. Farley, *Trends in Racial Inequalities: Have the Gains of the 1960's Disappeared in the 1970's?*, 42 AM. SOC. REV. 189 (1977).

34. Chesney-Lind, *Judicial Enforcement of the Female Sex Role: The Family Court and the Female Delinquent*, 8 ISSUES IN CRIMINOLOGY 51 (1973); Datesman, Scarpitti, & Stephenson, *Female Delinquency: An Application of Self and Opportunity Theories*, 12 J. OF RESEARCH IN CRIME AND DELINQUENCY 107 (1975).