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GENDER, PEER GROUP EXPERIENCES, AND SERIOUSNESS OF DELINQUENCY

MERRY MORASH

The degree to which gender effects on both aggressive and property delinquency are mediated by peer group experiences is examined with data on 588 adolescents in two types of urban communities. The data best support an explanation in which gender has its major effect on the type of peer group to which an adolescent belongs. More specifically, girls belong to less delinquent groups, and this is a salient factor in accounting for their lower levels of delinquency. The findings point to the need to delineate specific gender differences that lead girls to be in less delinquent groups, and in so doing to reorient research on the etiology of delinquency to an examination of the individual predispositions and the environmental circumstances that result in youths joining peer groups that are supportive of illegal behavior.

One of the most firmly established findings in juvenile delinquency research is that peer group experiences are strongly related to the seriousness of an individual's delinquency (e.g., Poole and Regoli, 1979; Weis et al., 1980). A second well-established finding is that gender is strongly related to delinquency (e.g., Gold, 1970; Hindelang, 1971, 1981; Weis, 1976). In a recent substantiation of both of these findings, Weis and Sederstrom (1981: 27) concluded from their reanalysis of six major data sets on delinquency that "the strongest average correlation across six data sets is between delinquency (both self-reported and official) and peer items (peer culture activities, delinquency of friends), followed by sex of the respondent." Given the strong relationship of both peer group

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variables and gender to delinquency, and in response to the widely recognized lack of research and need to extend crime causation theory beyond just males to females (e.g., see Harris, 1977; Smart, 1977; Klein, 1973; Leonard, 1982), the major objective of the present study was to explore the interrelationships among gender, peer group experiences, and seriousness of delinquency.

The bulk of traditional criminological literature (e.g., Schur, 1969; Sutherland and Cressey, 1970: 126-131) has generally suggested that girls are less delinquent because they are less exposed to the social and situational causes of delinquency. Insofar as the peer group is concerned, girls' groups would be less likely than those of boys to have the characteristics that promote delinquency. The proposition that girls and boys are differentially exposed to the social causes of delinquency is in accord with recent arguments that as the experiences of girls and boys become more similar, their patterns of delinquency also will become more similar (Giordano and Cernkovich, 1979: 538; Figueira-McDonough et al., 1981).

In examining the interrelationships among gender, peer group characteristics, and delinquency, it is important to consider offenses against the person separately from property offenses. Research has shown the greatest disparity between girls' and boys' delinquency for offenses against the person (Simon, 1975a, 1975b; Steffensmeier and Steffensmeier, 1980), and the least difference for minor and drug-related offenses (Beschner and Treasure, 1979; Johnson et al., 1976; Figueira-McDonough et al., 1981). Thus it is possible that peer group characteristics are related to the two types of illegal behavior differently.

A full understanding of the interrelationships of gender, peer group variations, and delinquency is crucial in establishing the direction of research that is most likely to advance theory development. If empirical research shows that peer group differences explain the greater seriousness of boys' delinquency, then the future study of the dynamics through which girls and boys find their ways into different kinds of peer groups would be of considerable importance. The questions to be addressed would require a delineation of the predispositions that might lead girls to choose or form the groups that are least supportive of delinquency, the peer and other constraints that limit girls to these groups, and the social-structural factors that account for these predispositions and constraints. Such an emphasis would be a shift toward the study of the individual interacting with the peer group and away from the more

limited focus on individual sex role differences that is common in much current thinking about gender differences in illegal behavior (e.g., Nye, 1958; Reckless, 1957; Hoffman-Bustamante, 1973: 117; Rosenblum, 1975).

*SPECIFIC PEER GROUP EXPERIENCES
TO EXPLAIN GENDER DIFFERENCES
IN DELINQUENCY*

There is a considerable literature on the specific peer group experiences that explain delinquency, and a much more limited body of work that links these characteristics to differences between girls and boys. The extensive theory and research on one peer group variable—peers' delinquency as indicated by either behavior or values—has already been cited. Simons et al. (1980) conducted one of the few studies that considered gender in examining the relationship of self-reported delinquency with peers' value orientation. Not only was the correlation stronger than any other in the research, but it was similar for girls and boys. Peers' values, furthermore, was important in explaining the relationship of gender to delinquency. Jensen and Eve (1976) similarly found that peers' delinquency was strongly related to each subject's delinquency, and it explained the lower delinquency of girls. Aside from these studies, the need remains to explore a wider range of peer group variables as they relate to gender and delinquency.

For some peer group characteristics, the literature is unclear about how the peer group difference related to girls' lower levels of delinquency. Giordano (1978: 130) suggested that girls' membership in a coed group increases their opportunity and stimulus for serious delinquency. However, there is a long recognized tendency for single-sex groups to give way to mixed-sex groups during mid-adolescence (e.g., see Dunphy, 1969; Hollingshead, 1949; Smith, 1962). Is the change usually accompanied by (1) absorption of the girls into boys' more delinquent subcultures or (2) reduction in the boys' delinquency when the group activities shift toward dating and courtship? The criminological literature does not provide a clear answer. Quicker (1975; also see Gora, 1982: 82) observed that as the members matured, Chicana gangs in Los Angeles had an increasing number of female members who were actively involved in aggressive delinquency. Alternatively, Klein et al. (1971) found that

black female gang members inhibited the violence of boys in the group. We can only conclude that the most frequent effect of the gender integration of adolescent groups is not known.

Several people (Vedder, 1956; Wattenberg, 1956; Cavan, 1962; Klein et al., 1971) have pointed to girls' peripheral status in mixed groups as the reason that they are less delinquent than the boys. Based on their own research, Giordano and Cernkovich (1979: 533) rejected this view as stereotypic, and instead emphasized a general lack of knowledge about girls in adolescent peer groups. Again, we are left with a question about the relationship of the delinquency of individual group members with the group's gender composition, dating and courtship activities, and the youth's status in the group.

Amount of time spent with peers and attachment to peers are two other peer group variables that have been identified as explanatory of girls' low levels of delinquency. Hoffman-Bustamante (1973) emphasized that girls in our society are more closely supervised than are boys, which might limit the time they could spend with peers and thus result in less delinquency (also see Giordano, 1978: 130; Sutherland and Cressey, 1970: 127). Differences in girls' and boys' relative levels of attachment to peers could explain their different levels of delinquency; Hirschi (1969) and Hindelang (1973) showed an indirect relationship between high levels of attachment and delinquency, and girls are thought to be more attached to their families whereas boys often are characterized as more attached to their peers.

Besides research and writing on the relationship of general peer group structure and process to delinquency, much of the literature has stressed the importance of teenage gang membership (e.g., Miller, 1958, 1981; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955). From the time when the so-called gang theories became popular through the present, serious questions have been raised about whether membership in a gang as opposed to membership in a delinquent peer group that did not fit the gang image was explanatory of much delinquency, because very few youths can be classified as gang members (Toby, 1961; Morash, 1983a). Despite the questions about the role of gangs in the etiology of most delinquency, and a general lack of empirical support for the specific theories that have focused on gangs, it is still commonly argued that gangs do promote delinquency of the most serious type. In fact, although the original theories that focused on gangs were limited to boys' delinquency, Giordano (1978: 130) recently reported that 53.7% of a group of institutionalized girls said that they had belonged to a group that could

be called a "gang" (also see Miller, 1973). Even though few adolescent peer groups would be classified as gangs by common criteria, it is possible that the most seriously delinquent girls and boys are in those groups. Thus the special characteristics of peer groups that would qualify as gangs could be related to seriousness of delinquency for both girls and boys.

The various theories of gang delinquency are distinct from each other, but the special attributes of these groups are quite consistent from theory to theory (Miller, 1974). Members recurrently congregate outside of their homes and primarily with each other. They see themselves as having rights to a territory proximate to their homes and meeting place. They are structured partly according to age, have a large number of members, are usually all male, have a well-defined leadership, and they engage in a wide range of activities together.

Solidarity in the gang is a final factor that has been linked to delinquency. With some exceptions (Jansyn, 1966), the literature has concluded that an increase in solidarity is followed by increased delinquency (Klein, 1971; Yablonsky, 1961).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the large number of peer group and gang variables that have been pinpointed in alternative delinquency theories, one step in the present research was to identify the full range of variables that are significantly related to either girls' or boys' seriousness of property and aggressive delinquency. Then, the relationships between the identified predictor variables and delinquency were examined in order to determine whether gender effects are mediated by peer group experience.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The cross-sectional data collected for the present study were useful in providing the much needed basic information on the peer group variables that are related to girls' and boys' delinquency. It is recognized, however, that the study does not address questions raised in the controversy between those who argue that delinquent peers cause delinquent

behavior (Sutherland and Cressey, 1970; Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967; Glaser, 1956; Akers et al., 1979; Hirschi, 1969; Jensen, 1972; Hepburn, 1977; Johnson, 1979) and those who argue that youths who are already oriented toward and/or exhibiting delinquent behavior seek out and join delinquent peer groups (Liska, 1973; Empey and Lubeck, 1971a, 1971b; Downes, 1966). The question of time order remains to be addressed in future research.

Sampling

The sample was drawn in two Boston communities that were purposively selected to represent common types of urban areas. Thus findings from the present research cannot necessarily be generalized to communities and social class groups that are unlike the ones where the sample was drawn. In particular, middle- and upper-class communities (e.g., see Richards, 1981), or communities with differing histories and ethnic compositions, may provide different gender-related socialization and opportunities to take part in delinquent activities and to join peer groups. In spite of this limitation, there is no reason to conclude that the findings are unique because the communities did represent common types of urban areas relevant to the study of delinquency (Spergel, 1975).

One community, East Boston, has primarily a working-class population. Many of the employed East Boston residents hold low-skilled jobs or jobs in which skills are learned through apprenticeship, and a large proportion of the adult population is Italian-born or second generation. Similar to the community described by Gans (1963) in *The Urban Villagers*, East Boston is characterized by street-corner groups of all ages. Some lower-class groups live in or near public housing and there is nearly a complete absence of middle- and upper-class residents and of racial minorities. The entire area is characterized by a low population mobility.

The other community, the Allston-Brighton section of Boston, has a mixture of racial and ethnic groups, including a majority of whites, a substantial minority of blacks, and small numbers of recent Hispanic and Oriental immigrants. Population mobility is high, ranging from 35% to 52% turnover in a year in the three parts of the area. Reflecting the heterogeneity of the area, nearly one-fourth of the families are poor, with incomes under \$5,000, whereas one-third of the working population have professional-level jobs. The physical heterogeneity of the area is evidenced by its division in half by the Massachusetts Turnpike, and the

unplanned conglomeration of deteriorated industrial plants and warehouses that are mixed with small shops, deteriorated housing, and pockets of high-income housing.

A sample of 1073 youths was drawn from school, police, court, and correctional records in the two communities. All youths with police, court, and correctional contact during one year were included, and a systematic sample of public school students was taken. Fortunately for the present study, the school records included the names of some dropouts, and although dropouts without juvenile records still may have been underrepresented, they were not omitted. If youths had a record of a more serious contact with the juvenile justice system than was reflected by the category in which they were initially sampled, they were reclassified to the more serious subgroup. This reclassification was done for very few ($n = 30$) cases.

All subjects were mailed an invitation to be in the study, and just under 15% responded. For the remaining youths, considerable effort was made to establish telephone and/or personal contact. Personal contact included visits to the youth's home, school, and/or street corner. The use of each of these approaches left us with 146 youths who could not be reached by any means. Of the 927 who were contacted, 63.4% ($n = 588$) eventually participated in a 1- to 3-hour interview and received a payment of \$10.00.

The sample disproportionately represented youths who had juvenile justice system records, for one part of the research that is not described in the present article compared youths at different stages of processing (Morash, 1984). In order to avoid the resulting distortion of population parameters, weighting was used in the analysis (Baily, 1978: 88-90). Based on juvenile justice system records and the U.S. 1980 Census, it was estimated that 11.4% of juveniles in the communities where data were collected had contact with the juvenile justice system during a one-year period. Thus weights were used in the analysis to establish a contribution of 11.4% for youths with a juvenile justice system record and 88.6% for youths with none. Fractional weights were used in order to avoid inflating the sample size.

Although the weighting provided a partial correction for lack of representativeness in the sample, it is known that there are some other sources of bias. One known source of bias was introduced by differences between subgroups in the degree to which any initial contact could be established and in willingness of child and parent to take part in the study once contacted (Table 1). There were relatively small but statistically

significant tendencies for girls to be impossible to contact or to refuse an interview once contacted, and for nonwhite youths to be in the group that was impossible to contact. (Youths who were impossible to contact could not be reached by mail, home, or street-corner visit.) Also, youths committed to the State Division of Youth Services were much more likely than others to be impossible to contact. Due to the Massachusetts policy of deinstitutionalization, however, the committed group was extremely small ($n = 37$ for both communities), so the nonrespondents from this group constitute a very minimal loss from the total youth population. Even if a simple random sample had been taken, the committed youths would be very unlikely to be selected. A final documented difference was that the Allston-Brighton youths were more likely than those from Boston to be in the group that was impossible to contact by any means, perhaps because of the greater mobility within the Allston-Brighton community. In the calculation of the chi-square statistics, in no case did the difference between actual and expected values amount to more than 50 youths, or 5% of the total sample. Thus biases introduced by the possibility of locating a youth and the youth's agreement to participate in the study were not great and youths from the full range of subgroups of interest did participate in the study.

Measurement

SERIOUSNESS OF DELINQUENCY

The measure of delinquency was obtained through structured interview procedures based on an adaptation of Gold's (1970) self-report scale. Youths were asked to report the frequency, ranging up to two times, with which they had done the following within the last year:

- (1) purposely damaged or messed up something not belonging to them;
- (2) hurt or injured someone on purpose;
- (3) threatened to hurt or injure someone;
- (4) went into a house or building when they knew that they were not supposed to;
- (5) took part in a fight where a bunch of their friends were against another bunch;
- (6) took a car without the permission of the owner even if the car was returned; and
- (7) took something not belonging to them, even if returned.

TABLE 1: Comparison of Respondents and Nonrespondents on Subgroup Characteristics (n = 1073)^a

Subgroup	Interviewed		Refused		Impossible to Contact		df	χ^2
	%	n	%	n	%	n		
Girls	46.1	235	37.3	190	16.7	85		
Boys	62.7	353	26.5	149	10.8	61	2	31.4*
White	56.6	445	33.3	262	10.1	79		
Nonwhite	49.8	143	26.8	77	23.3	67	2	31.9*
School	56.4	361	31.9	204	11.7	75		
Police	54.4	117	28.4	61	17.2	37		
Court	55.8	101	33.1	60	11.1	20		
Committed	24.3	9	37.8	14	37.8	14	6	28.7*
Allston-Brighton	52.3	301	29.5	170	18.2	105		
East Boston	57.7	287	34.0	169	8.2	41	2	22.7*

a. These figures were produced without weighting.

* $p \leq .01$.

Follow-up questions were used to ascertain whether specific offenses, such as murder and robbery, had been committed and to obtain detailed information about each offense.¹ Then Gold's adaptation of the Wolfgang and Sellin (1964) seriousness scores was used to weight each reported offense that was not judged to be trivial. A composite score was computed to reflect seriousness of delinquency, and separate scores were computed to reflect seriousness for aggressive offenses (assault, threat of assault, group fighting) and property offenses (vandalism, theft, car theft, breaking and entering).

The decision to focus on seriousness of delinquency rather than incidence or frequency was based on both theoretical and methodological considerations. It is well established that girls and boys commit the same range of offenses, but boys exhibit some types of serious delinquency that are atypical for girls (Figueira-McDonough et al., 1981; Canter, 1982; Hindelang et al., 1981; Giordano and Cernkovich, 1979; Steffensmeier and Steffensmeier, 1980; Gold, 1970). Therefore, an incidence score for particular types of delinquency falls short in reflecting that, even if the range of offenses committed by girls and boys is the same, the seriousness of the harm they produce is not comparable.

A second reason for focusing on seriousness scores is that, even within the specific categories of property and aggressive delinquency, similar frequency counts can obscure dissimilar behavior.² Girls more often than boys self-report trivial offenses when responding to general questions about the frequency of their offenses against property and people, and

they more often describe less serious loss of property and harm to the victim when pressed for details of theft and assault behavior (Morash and Wright, 1983; also see Canter, 1982; Hindelang et al., 1981). A system for weighting seriousness allows for the screening out of trivial offenses and for a numerical summary of variations in the amount of harm.

PEER GROUP VARIABLES

Youths were asked to identify a group with whom they spent their free time. Of the 588 youths interviewed, 535 said that they did have a regular group of friends, and the analysis for this article focuses on these 535 youths. Many of the youths who did not identify a group were new to the area, were recent immigrants, or were near age 18 and were involved in serious courtship relationships. For the youths who identified a peer group, structured interview procedures were used to obtain measures of the peer group variables that were suggested by the literature.

In order to obtain a measure of peers' activities, subjects were asked about five common types of behavior in street-corner groups: (1) conflict and fighting; (2) legitimate group activities such as sports and social events; (3) various mating behaviors such as dating or flirting; (4) drug-oriented activities, and (5) delinquent behaviors (Short and Strodtbeck, 1965: 167). Based on a factor analysis (reported in Morash, 1983a), three orientations were shown in the sample: delinquency coupled with poor school performance and including drug use; dating and working; and sports. A low negative score on one of the variables indicated that the youth's peer group rarely if ever engaged in the particular type of activity, and a high positive score indicated that the peer group was more likely than other groups to engage in the activity. Although the delinquency and the dating and courtship factors were of primary interest in the present research, the third factor, sports, was considered so that no activity orientation was omitted.

Youths were asked to supply information about the following peer group variables that have been identified as characteristic of gangs (Miller, 1974): typical age for joining, typical age for leaving, existence of a group name, existence of a younger or an older membership contingent, existence of a meeting place outside of the home, restrictions on membership, restrictions on places the group will venture, residential proximity of members, size, and sex composition of the group.³ Informants who had grown up in the community and who were in frequent

contact with street-corner groups indicated that some questions might produce invalid responses. Specifically, youths might make up the name of a meeting place and a group name in an effort to make it seem that they belonged to a gang. Additionally, they might underreport restrictions on joining or fears of going places, thereby conveying that they were not "prejudiced" or "afraid," respectively. Therefore, informants judged the validity of responses to these questions. Only 1.9% of the respondents said that they met in a place judged to be fictitious, and only 3.4% gave a name that was judged fictitious. However, 29.1% indicated no restrictions on joining, contrary to the judgment of an informant; and 18.4% indicated unreasonable answers to the question about the group's fear of going to other areas. The last two items, therefore, were not considered in the analysis.

One of the remaining peer group variables, solidarity, was measured with a standard scale (Seashore, 1954).⁴ A Likert-type scale was used to measure youths' reported attachment to their peers. Youths also were asked to report the number of days per week that they usually spent time with their groups and their status as a leader, regular member, or as "not really part of the group."

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Race, age, social class, and community type were measured in order that they could be considered as control variables. Hollingshead's Two Factor Index of Social Position (Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958) was used to obtain a measure of social class; parents' educational background and job type were obtained from a telephone interview with a parent.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Gender and Seriousness of Delinquency

For girls, the range in scores on the Gold scale to measure delinquency was from 0 to 18; for boys it was from 0 to 31. When property and aggressive delinquency were considered separately, there was no gender difference in the range of scores for property offenses (0 to 14), but for aggressive offenses the girls' range (0 to 8) was smaller than the boys' (0 to 18). Although more boys (49.3%) had aggressive delinquency scores

that were in the higher ranges at or above 3, some girls (15.4%) were in this higher range, and many girls (21.9%) had scores of 1 or 2. Thus, contrary to the common assumption that girls almost completely abstain from serious delinquency against other people, a rather sizable group have committed some aggressive acts, and in some cases the girls' seriousness scores were above the mean for both the male and female groups.

The distributions for seriousness of composite, property, and aggressive delinquency were all positively skewed, indicating large numbers of youths with little or no seriousness of delinquency and small numbers with extreme scores. Consistent with many previous studies, the girls had significantly lower mean scores than the boys on all measures of delinquency seriousness (Table 2).

Gender and Peer Group Characteristics

The peer groups of girls and boys differed significantly in a number of ways. In particular, girls' groups had less delinquent and sports activity, and had members typically joining at age 13 rather than the boys' average age of 12 (Table 3). Furthermore, girls' peers were somewhat less likely than boys' peers to have a regular meeting place outside of their homes, to draw members from a restricted neighborhood area, to have a younger or older contingent of members, and to be limited to one sex (Table 4). There were, however, no significant differences between girls' and boys' peer groups in solidarity, typical age for leaving the group, level of dating and courtship activity, size, role in the group, and existence of a group name. Additionally, girls and boys differed significantly neither in the number of days per week that they met with their groups nor in their attachment to their peers.

Intercorrelations

Correlations (not shown) were examined separately for gender groups so that relationships that were significant for only one group or were negative in one but positive in the other would not be masked. The correlations among the peer group and demographic variables were generally low to moderate, and many were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Consistent with the contention that most youths, including those who are highly delinquent, are not members of stereotypic gangs, there was

TABLE 2: Comparison of Girls and Boys on Mean Scores for Seriousness of Delinquency (n = 521)^a

<i>Seriousness of Delinquency</i>	<i>Females</i>		<i>Males</i>		<i>F</i>
	<i>x</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>sd</i>	
Composite measure	2.1	2.8	4.6	5.4	42.5*
Property	1.0	1.4	2.2	2.8	40.6*
Aggressive	1.2	2.0	2.4	3.4	25.7*

a. The sample of 535 youths with a peer group was reduced to 521 due to missing data. Weighting was used for this and all following analyses.

* $p \leq .01$.

no clear pattern of intercorrelations between the various features thought to differentiate gangs from other groups. In fact, as some critics (e.g., see Yablonsky, 1961; Spencer, 1964; Downes, 1966; Cohen, 1980; summary by Empey, 1978: 236) of the gang theories have noted, the youths with the groups that were most oriented toward delinquency reported that their groups had low levels of solidarity. Demographic variables also were unrelated or just weakly related to each other or to peer group variables, suggesting that the peer group experiences of youths did not markedly differ by community, race, or social class in the two communities where the sample was drawn.

Although there were several differences in the correlations among peer group and demographic variables for girls and boys, they were minor, with the difference consistently less than or equal to .15. Often they involved variables that were not statistically significant, and there was no clear, gender-related pattern in differences involving significant correlations.

The variable that was most consistently related to measures of delinquency seriousness was delinquent orientation of peers, and this finding was significant at the .05 level for both gender groups and for the composite measure (for girls, $r = .45$; for boys, $r = .60$) as well as separate measures of aggressive (for girls, $r = .35$; for boys, $r = .53$) and property (for girls, $r = .40$; for boys, $r = .52$) delinquency. For the boys, a group orientation toward dating and courtship also was significantly related to all measures of seriousness of delinquency (r ranged from .17 to .21) and for girls it was related to the composite measure ($r = .14$). Again, only for the boys, all measures of delinquency seriousness had a weak correlation (.20 or under) with being white, being older, and being from the working-class community. For girls there were weak negative relationships of seriousness of property offenses to both group solidarity and

TABLE 3: Comparison of Girls and Boys on Mean Scores for Peer Group Characteristics^a

Peer Group Characteristics	Girls (<i>n</i> = 264)		Boys (<i>n</i> = 257)		<i>F</i>
	\bar{x}	<i>sd</i>	\bar{x}	<i>sd</i>	
Delinquent activity	-.3	.7	.3	1.0	64.1*
Mating/dating activity	.1	.8	-.1	.8	2.2
Sports activity	-.2	.7	.3	.6	64.8*
Solidarity	9.0	2.8	8.9	2.6	.0
Size	13.4	11.0	14.2	12.1	.6
Joining age	13.2	2.3	12.5	2.7	10.4*
Leaving age	18.9	8.2	19.1	5.6	.1
Days of involvement/week	5.4	1.9	5.4	1.9	.1

a. Sample sizes are slightly reduced due to missing data.

* $p \leq .01$.

attachment to peers, and being in a mixed-sex group was weakly related to seriousness of aggressive delinquency. Girls' self-identification as a leader was significantly related to the composite measure of delinquency ($r = .24$) and to the measure of aggressive delinquency ($r = .30$).

The two additional variables that were significantly related to some measure of delinquency seriousness were group size and days per week of group participation. Both were positively related to all measures of seriousness of boys (r ranged from .15 to .28), and days of participation was positively related to girls' seriousness of aggressive delinquency ($r = .20$).

Regression Analysis

A regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which gender differences in delinquency are explained by peer group variations. Only peer group and demographic variables that had a correlation of at least .15 with one of the delinquency measures for at least one of the gender groups were considered. The one exception was that when a variable that was part of a dummy variable coding scheme was included, the others were included. The proportion of explained variance (R^2) ranged from a low of .30 for property crime to .40 for the composite index (Table 5). All of the R^2 values were statistically significant at the .01 level.

As shown in Table 5, except for peers' delinquent activity, gender was consistently the variable most strongly related to seriousness of both

TABLE 4: Comparison of Boys and Girls on Proportion with Different Peer Group Characteristics

<i>Peer Group Characteristics</i>	<i>Boys</i>		<i>Girls</i>		<i>df</i>	<i>χ²</i>
	%	<i>n</i> ^a	%	<i>n</i> ^a		
Role in Peer Group						
Leader	13.5	34	17.8	47		
Regular	26.7	188	35.4	171		
Peripheral	13.3	33	17.6	42	2	4.6
Existence of Meeting Place						
Yes	67.5	173	56.1	148		
No	32.5	83	43.9	116	1	6.9*
Existence of a Name						
Yes	5.5	14	8.4	22		
No	94.5	243	91.6	242	1	1.3
Residential Proximity of Members						
Yes	62.8	161	46.0	122		
No	37.2	95	54.0	143	1	14.1*
Younger/Older Contingent						
Yes	51.5	132	31.3	83		
No	48.5	125	68.7	181	1	21.0*
Single-Sex Group						
Yes	46.3	119	29.2	77		
No	53.7	138	70.8	187	1	15.1*
Attachment to Peers						
Much	47.4	122	59.4	157		
Some	44.1	115	34.1	90		
Little	5.1	13	4.1	11		
None	32.5	6	2.3	6	3	7.9

a. The number of boys and girls may differ due to missing data and columns in chi-square tables may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

* $p \leq .01$.

property and aggressive offenses.⁵ The correlations of each of the measures of delinquency with gender were moderate and statistically significant. After the introduction of other demographic and peer group variables, the beta for gender was still significant for the composite and property offenses, but not for the aggressive offenses, and for all types of offenses it was greatly overshadowed in importance by peers' delinquent activity. Whereas the simple gender-to-delinquency correlation stood out as being stronger than all but the correlation of peers' delinquency to

TABLE 5: Regression Output Showing the Relationships of Gender, Other Demographic Variables, and Peer Group Variables with Seriousness of Delinquency

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>All Offenses (n = 503)^a</i>		<i>Property Offenses (n = 503)^a</i>		<i>Aggressive Offenses (n = 503)^a</i>	
	<i>r</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Gender	.27*	.08*	.26*	.08*	.21*	.05
Other Demographic Variables						
Black	-.05	-.03	-.05	-.01	-.04	-.03
White	.12*	-.04	.11*	.02	.10*	-.04
Age	.14*	.01	.11*	.01	.13*	.01
Working-class community	.13*	.08*	.11*	.08*	.11*	.06
Peer Group Variables						
Delinquent activity	.59*	.57*	.52*	.52*	.50*	.47*
Dating/courtship activity	.15*	.10*	.13*	.12*	.14*	.06
Leaving age	.02	-.01	-.01	-.02	.03	-.01
Single-sex group	-.08*	.01	-.03	.03	-.10	-.01
Size	.15*	-.10*	.07	-.15*	.19*	-.03
Attachment to peers	-.09*	-.01	-.12*	-.03	-.04	.01
Regular member	-.04	.06	.03	.07	-.08*	.04
Leader	.12*	.15*	.01	.05	.18*	.18*
Days involvement/week	.17*	.08*	.13*	.06	.17*	.09
R ²		.40		.32		.30
df		14,488		14,488		14,488
F		22.9*		16.7*		15.1*

a. The sample size was reduced to 254 for girls with a peer group and to 249 for boys with a peer group because of missing data.
 *p ≤ .01.

individual's delinquency, the beta for gender was equal to or slightly less than other significant betas. For property offenses, the other significant betas showed delinquency to be related to residence in the working-class community, peers' dating and courtship activity, and small group size.⁶ For aggressive offenses, the significant betas were for self-identification as a group leader and days of involvement per week.

In sum, the modest gender effect shown by the simple correlations is largely though not completely mediated by peer group variables. The most important peer group variable is peers' delinquent activity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A number of the peer group variables that were hypothesized to be related to delinquency were found to be unrelated in the correlational and/or regression analyses. Consistent with the criticism that prior research has overemphasized the peer group characteristics that are identified in theories of gang delinquency, although the girls' groups had fewer of the attributes of a gang, none of these were of importance in explaining delinquency. The male-centered gang theories of delinquency appear to be less useful in explaining delinquency than the more general group process theories, which also are more amenable to extension beyond the behavior of boys to the behavior of girls. Additionally, despite speculation that the integration of girls into same-sexed groups would increase their delinquency, after control variables were considered, this was not supported. Finally, group solidarity was unrelated to delinquency, perhaps because of the possibility observed by Jansyn (1966) that both low and high solidarity can stimulate delinquent activity. The similar finding of no correlation between delinquency and attachment to peers contradicts theories in which group members are highly effective in socializing each other to accept delinquent orientations.

The finding of a strong association between peer group orientation and seriousness of delinquency, even after controlling for demographic and other peer group variables, is consistent with the results of research on quite different samples from a variety of communities (Simons et al., 1980; Weis and Sederstrom, 1981; Jenson and Eve, 1976; Figueira-McDonough et al., 1981; Johnson, 1979). Even for aggressive delinquency, which some (e.g., Hoffman-Bustamante, 1973) would argue is directly affected by basic gender differences, peers' orientation rather

than gender has the direct effect. Thus, if gender status and socialization have an effect, it may be through their influence on the type of peer group that an adolescent joins.

An important question highlighted by the present study, and one that cannot be adequately addressed by either prior or present research, concerns the tendency for girls to be in the less delinquent groups. Theorists who have concerned themselves with boys' delinquency have suggested that youths who are already oriented toward and/or exhibiting delinquent behavior seek out and join delinquent peer groups (Liska, 1973; Empey and Lubeck, 1971a, 1971b, Downes, 1966). Then, according to both theory and empirical research, delinquency is further supported and encouraged within the group (Sutherland and Cressey, 1970; Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967; Glaser, 1956; Akers et al., 1979; Hirschi, 1969; Jensen, 1972; Hepburn, 1977; Johnson, 1979). Yet the initial choice to join a delinquent group makes the subsequent influence possible, and therefore is of utmost importance.

These are just the beginnings of theoretical explanation and empirical research to explain why girls, either by choice or due to external constraints, end up in the least delinquent peer groups. Hoffman-Bustamante's (1973) analysis suggests some of the general influences: gender differentiated role expectations; the opportunity or pressure to join a group that shares delinquent orientations; and the fit between the kinds of offenses that girls are likely to commit and the offenses likely to be committed by members of the most delinquent groups of boys.

In an analysis of existing knowledge of women's involvement in underworld crime groups, ranging from syndicates to loosely structured groups, Steffensmeier (1983) identified a similar though more detailed set of factors limiting the involvement of women. These factors include the tendency for males to prefer to work, associate, and do business with other men; sex-typing of women by men as inappropriate colleagues and leaders; and the crime environment, in which there is emphasis on raw physical power plus the possibility for women to participate in crime by being objects in the illicit sex market. Steffensmeier hypothesized that variations in each of these factors explained the degree to which women took part in particular criminal groups, and thus in particular criminal activities. Clearly, Steffensmeier's ideas would require adaptation to apply to adolescent groups, which are not usually primarily organized to break the law and would be considerably less sophisticated than adult groups. However, sex-typing, preference for same-sexed groups, and—for those groups that do engage in delinquency together—an emphasis

on physical power would be worth exploring as they relate to adolescent movement into a particular peer group.

In addition to structural and situational constraints on girls, there may be individual-level variables that explain peer group membership. Gender-related characteristics of girls, such as greater empathy or an aversion to aggression, may result in their decision to refrain from joining the peers who are prone to violent acts against others (Morash, 1983b; Hoffman, 1977). Research on the external constraints on peer group membership, the decision-making process of girls, and the interaction of these sociological and individual level variables would provide a needed focus on gender as a key variable in the explanation of delinquency.

NOTES

1. As a feature of Gold's scale, there is a limit on the number of each offense type described. This allows a realistic amount of time to obtain detailed information on each reported offense. The information is needed to identify trivial offenses (e.g., pushing a sibling), and to attach a valid score for seriousness. This approach to measurement has been well validated by Gold (1970), and in the present study it captured a sufficient amount of variation in delinquency seriousness for meaningful analysis. The effect is similar to that obtained by eliminating extreme scores in a multiple regression analysis.

2. Johnson (1979: 115) has directly compared explanations of frequency and seriousness of delinquency and found that although the strength of relationship between peers' delinquency and one's own behavior differs slightly depending on the measure, the relationship is still found for both. Thus there is some evidence that a frequency measure would not provide markedly different results.

3. The decision to use each characteristic of a gang as an independent variable follows a precedent set in prior survey research that has used just one characteristic, the existence of a group name (Lerman, 1967; Giordano, 1978). It is recognized, partly due to the contradictory and sometimes unspecified sociological definitions of the term *gang*, that no single gang characteristic nor their sum total can validly indicate that the peer group is indeed a gang. Even if there were one agreed upon definition, it is problematic to measure gang membership in survey research. Respondents certainly cannot be expected to classify their groups accurately according to the sociologists' conceptualization of a gang, and informants, including law enforcement officials, do not have an unbiased view of gangs or their members. Accepting the measurement dilemma, the theories of delinquent gangs were used as a basis for choosing structural features of a peer group that might be related to delinquency and that could be measured in the effort to identify peer group variables that explain gender differences in seriousness of delinquency.

4. The questions to measure solidarity were as follows:

- (1) Which of these statements best describes how you feel about your friends.
 - (1) I am really a part of my group of friends.
 - (2) I am included in the group in most ways.

- (3) I am included in some ways, but not others.
- (4) I don't really belong to the group.
- (5) I don't belong to just one group of kids.
- (2) If you had a chance to join another group of kids and spend most of your time with them, how would you feel about joining?
 - (1) I would want to join very much.
 - (2) I would rather join a new group than stay with my group.
 - (3) It would make no difference to me.
 - (4) I would rather stay in the group I belong to now.
 - (5) I would very much want to stay in the group I belong to now.
- (3-5) How would you say that your group of friends compares with other groups in the community? Are they
 - (1) better than most groups,
 - (2) about the same as most groups, or
 - (3) not as good as most groups in
 - (a) The way kids get along together
 - (b) The way kids stick together
 - (c) The way that kids help each other out.

5. Although race, social class, and age were considered only as control variables in the present research, it is worth noting that findings of no relationship to delinquency when other variables were controlled replicated the results of many other studies (reviewed by Johnson, 1979: 12; Weis and Sederstrom, 1981: 26-27). Some studies have found that black girls are more delinquent than white girls, but this was not shown in the present research, and therefore might result from social class, community, or other race-related differences.

6. The simple correlation of group size with property offenses was positive but not significant. The negative but significant beta weight appears to be due to a suppressor effect.

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