



Girls' Violence: Beyond Dangerous Masculinity

Katherine Irwin^{1*} and Meda Chesney-Lind²

¹ Department of Sociology and ² Women's Studies Program, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Abstract

In this article, we review criminological perspectives of girls' violence. To do this, we first look at the 20th-century tendency to view violent girls as being the same as violent boys or as taking up dangerous types of masculinity. Second, we consider the contemporary ways that researchers have tried to move beyond male-centered and masculinized explanations of female violence. Noting potential problems with current perspectives, we argue that researchers need to address the contexts surrounding female offending, which includes understanding the effects and nature of gender, race, and class inequalities and how they (singly and in combination) predict popular representations and treatment of violent girls. We conclude by cautioning contemporary researchers to avoid returning to androcentric perspectives of girls' physical aggression. Not only are such perspectives logically problematic, they are also consequential. In particular, they have facilitated the masculinization and punishment of poor or working-class girls of color who are filling US detention centers and juvenile prisons in ever increasing numbers.

Violent girls: Don't believe the hype

The turn of the century was characterized by a startling criminological development. The long-standing gender gap in youth violence appeared to be swiftly closing.¹ The buzz about the increasing dangerousness of girlhood started when arrest data from the 1990s revealed dramatic growth in girls' arrest rates for violent crimes in comparison to boys' rates, which appeared to be either leveling off or dropping. For example, between 1986 and 1995, girls' arrests for violence increased by 124% while boys' increased by 60% (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1996). By 1999, boys' violence arrests seemed to slow down (decreasing 10% between 1990 and 1999) whereas girls' arrest rates continued to climb (by nearly 40% during this same period) (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2000).

We now know that the evidence for girls' increasing violence was not being found in other measures designed to track girls' behavior. Generally speaking, when criminologists study crime trends, there are three data sources available: arrest, self-report, and victimization data. At the same

time that girls were being arrested for violence more frequently, a variety of data sources indicated that girls were not self-reporting more violence (see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1992–2006; Chesney-Lind and Belknap 2004; Huizinga 1997). In addition, girls' violence was also not increasing according to the national victimization studies (Steffensmeier et al. 2005). Because the upsurge in girls' violence appeared only in the arrest data, and not in the two other sources, it seemed likely that the rising arrest rates for girls' violence had more to do with the changes in police practices than dramatic changes in girls' behaviors. Explaining this trend, Chesney-Lind (2001) noted that there has always been, and will always be, violent girls. During some epochs, violent girls are ignored and trivialized. During other eras, however, girls' violence is 'rediscovered' and hyped. At the dawn of the 21st century, girls' violence has been rediscovered in ways that have spurred new theory making about girls' violence. These perspectives, we contend, are consequential since we think that at least some of them have encouraged a broader policing of girls in a variety of contexts.

Although increases in girls' arrest rates tracked changes in police practices rather than changes in girls' violence, the idea that girls were becoming equally as violent as boys became a media staple. Newspaper articles announced that 'girls are moving into the world of violence that once belonged to boys' (Ford 1998), that '... in a new twist on equality, girls' crime resembles boys' (Guido 1998), and that 'there are more girls in gangs, more girls in the drug trade, more girls carrying guns and knives, more girls in trouble' (Lee 1991, A1). It is important to note that the images of violent girls in the media accounts were primarily girls of color, often pictured brandishing weapons or even peering over the barrel of a gun. Popular trade books such as Prothrow-Stith and Spivak's (2005) *Sugar and Spice and No Longer Nice* and Garbarino's (2006) *See Jane Hit* endorsed the media message that girls were growing more violent. As a result of increasing popular culture attention, girls' violence also prompted a growing number of academics to think seriously about the topic.

Given the importance of this topic, we feel that it is a good time to take stock of what we know about girls' violence and identify some trends in the contemporary academic literature. In this paper, we identify several ways that criminologists have thought about girls and violence. We start with the historic tendency to explain girls' violence through the same lens used to examine boys' violence. We link this pattern to theories suggesting that violent girls are escaping their femininity by taking on the traits of their male counterparts. We also trace how the old and newer 'masculinization' assumptions have shaped juvenile justice practice. Looking at several contemporary treatments of girls' violence that attempt to depart from masculinization perspectives, we offer a view of girls' violence that accounts for gender inequalities and girls' agency in ways that do not describe violent girls in terms of male offending.

Are girls the same as or different from boys? The emergence of masculinized perspectives of violent girls

Since Lombroso (1894), criminological thinking about female offending has been plagued by a series of questions and limitations. One question is whether female crime can be explained using the same theories that explain male crime. In other words, are female offenders the same as or are they different from male offenders? Authors have used several terms to capture this historic criminological theme. For example, Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988, 508) argue that 'theories of gender and crime can be built in several ways ... Some are focusing on what we have called the generalizability problem, while others are interested in what we have termed the gender ratio problem.' Generalizability refers to the quest to find theories that account equally for male and female offending. The gender ratio problem describes scholarship focused on the 'gap' or difference between male and female offending. Miller (2001, 199) suggests that the 'gender ratio' and 'generalizability' problem fits within a larger 'gender differences' and 'gender similarities' framework and argues that the '... the former tends to essentialize differences between women and men, fails to account for similarities in their experiences, and also overlooks important differences between women ... On the other hand, the "gender similarities" approach often results in a failure to be attentive to the importance of gender.'

There are several versions of gender similarities and gender differences perspectives in the criminology literature. Universal theories of crime, for example, have focused on neighborhood, family, school, or peer contexts. These fit within the gender similarities perspective as they attempt to explain crime causation across gender lines. Interestingly, while aiming for universality, several of the seminal criminological theories were developed using data with boys and men and then were generalized to include girls and women (see Hirschi 1969). There are also a variety of gender difference perspectives, which focus on biology, psychology, everyday interactions, and structural constraints. One enduring problem is that gender differences tend to be interpreted as gender deficiencies, with girls and women being viewed as sick, pathological, victimized, or powerless (see Pollak 1961).

Despite some consensus among feminist criminologists that gender 'similarities/differences' or gender 'generalizability/ratio' constructions are inherently limited, this dichotomous framework continues to drive how female offenders are theorized, constructed by the media, and treated within institutions. An example of the persistence of the similarities or differences framework can be seen in the emergence and popularity of the masculinization hypothesis. The masculinization perspective suggests that female offenders, especially violent girls, abandon their femininity and take on the masculine traits of their male counterparts. At its core, masculinization is a gender similarities perspective because it assumes that the same forces that propel men into violence will increasingly produce

violence in girls and women once they are freed from the constraints of their gender. In fact, masculine theories of female violence reinforce the historic problem with universal theories of crime. They imply that contemporary theories of violence (and crime, more broadly) need not attend to gender, but can simply 'add women and stir'. Since girls and women are now acting more like boys and men and gaining access to traditionally male settings, the theories will work to explain girls' behavior.

The masculinization hypothesis has emerged as a dominant perspective of violent girls in theory, the media, and criminal justice practice. At a time when punishment, retribution, and law and order dominate criminal justice philosophy and practice, viewing violent girls as 'masculine' and equally as dangerous as violent boys places girls in a precarious position within the justice system. In the following, we trace the origins of this hypothesis in criminological theories.

Sisters are doing it for themselves

The masculinization perspective became explicit in criminological work developed in the 1970s, at the same time as the rekindling of the women's rights movement. Adler's (1975) *Sisters in Crime* and Simon's (1975) *Women and Crime* comprise the classic statements at the time and crystallize public anxieties about a looming 'darker side' of women's emancipation (Adler 1975, 3). One common idea between these works is that women's emancipation allows women and girls to enter and gain equal footing in masculine domains. Freed from the protective constraints of traditional femininity and liberated from institutionalized inequalities blocking women from entrance into masculine worlds that confer prestige and wealth, many imagine that emancipated girls and women are free to become just as violent as boys and men in contexts that valorize danger, risk-taking, and crime.

The media were quick to pounce on the bad news about feminism. Often, these articles included law enforcement officers describing the new offenders along with pictures showcasing such notorious characters as Leslie Van Houten (convicted murderer and Charles Manson follower), Friederike Krabbe (kidnapper and member of the Red Army Faction terrorist organization), and even Patricia Hearst (who joined forces with the urban guerrilla warfare group, the Symbionese Liberation Army, who kidnapped her). In each case, the idea that women were entering masculine and violent worlds of serial killing, radical guerrilla warfare, and terrorism fueled the media's fascination with the dark side of women's equality.

Street liberation perspectives

In the 1980s, women's liberation theories of crime coupled with emerging perspectives of urban disadvantage to produce another installment of

masculinization theories. Regarding a contemporary focus on urban strains and inner-city disadvantage, scholars examined increasingly dire circumstances in US inner cities since the 1980s. Wilson (1996, 1987) focuses on the out-migration of industrial jobs from American urban centers. Wacquant (2001) looks at a 'deadly' combination of US institutionalized racism and neoliberal politics. Blumstein (1995) focuses on the emergence of new drug markets and the ensuing violence surrounding a new, underground industry. Combined these forces have turned poor urban neighborhoods into what some called 'hyper ghettos' that are wrought with unemployment, violence, and a growth of underground opportunities (see Venkatesh 2006). Researchers chronicled the effects of these shifts on masculinity and violence (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 1996). Anderson (1999) notes that these overarching conditions limit avenues to middle-class, white respectability for inner-city African Americans. As a result, some African American boys grow up craving status so much that they participate in an alternate avenue to respect: a violent and masculine 'code of the streets'. Similarly, Bourgois (1996) traces the effects of US colonialism in Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican immigration patterns to the alienation experienced by El Barrio residents. He notes that larger conditions leave second-generation, inner-city Puerto Rican men with few avenues to attain 'respeto', or the respect traditionally and ideally afforded to patriarchs. Violence becomes a rationalized response among these structurally 'vulnerable' men.

Offering what might be called a street liberation perspective, some explain women's and girls' inner-city experiences using the same theoretical framework to explain men's hypermasculinity and violence. In a series of articles and a subsequent book, Baskin and Sommers, in particular, examined African American girls and women in New York (Baskin et al. 1993; Sommers and Baskin 1992, 1993), and argue that 'violent offending rates of black females parallel [those] of white males' (Sommers and Baskin 1992, 191). The central argument cutting across their studies is that the socioeconomic situation in the inner city, specifically as it is affected by the drug trade, creates 'new dynamics of crime where gender is a far less salient factor' (Baskin et al. 1993, 417). The street liberation thesis, in fact, turns the 'emancipation' hypothesis on its head. Now, it is not presumed that economic gain promoted 'equality' in crime, rather economic marginalization and racism cause women to move out of their 'traditional' roles and into dangerous and masculine criminal worlds.

It is notable that this latest masculinization image of female offenders specifically pictures urban women of color, where the earlier masculinization manifestation featured theories (and media stories) showcasing white women. Similar to the previous masculinization theory, though, this perspective also gained considerable media attention, particularly when coupled with dramatic increases in girls' arrests for violent offenses. This time around, though, the media showcased girls of color, often in gang

attire, peering menacingly over the barrels of guns (Chesney-Lind and Irwin 2008).

Contemporary perspectives of girls' violence

In the past decade, girls' violence has become an increasingly key topic in criminology, given the rising violence arrest rates for girls. Consequently, new versions of gender similarities and gender differences perspectives have emerged, with some researchers attempting to bridge the divide between these dichotomies. We argue that in an era when the masculinization perspective dominates, theorists must be mindful that their theories about girls have consequences. These theories are, in fact, used to understand the 'criminal' behavior of girls as well as to craft criminal justice responses. To construct a non-masculinized theory of girls' violence, we take a look at contemporary perspectives of female violence, including those that look at patriarchy and gender inequalities, girls' attempts to be 'one of the guys', and girls' participation in a violent code of the streets.

Patriarchy and gendered inequalities

As we noted earlier, there are problems with constructing girls as being different from boys. One problem is that gender differences are often pathologized; this is especially true in individualistic biological and psychological theories. Gender differences in individualistic theories, as we have previously noted, are often located in girls' sick or weak biological or psychological makeup. Conversely, gender difference perspectives focusing on social structures tend to locate sickness and pathology in institutions and social systems. Although not perfect, such perspectives promise to locate problems outside individual girls and offer a critical gaze at larger social forces.

In the early 2000s, several scholars examined the role of patriarchy and gender inequality in girls' violence. Artz's (1998), Brown's (2003), and Morash and Chesney-Lind's (2006) work have been particularly influential in building a framework. A major premise of their work is that girls' violence is framed within a patriarchal context, meaning that gender inequalities, such as male domination (especially physical domination), lack of equal opportunities for women and girls, and pervasive control over girls and women (especially over their bodies and sexuality), are central and reoccurring themes in girls' violence. For example, Artz (1998) found that violent schoolgirls in Canada reported significantly greater rates of victimization and abuse than their nonviolent counterparts. Patterns for sexual abuse were even starker; roughly one out of four violent girls had been sexually abused compared to one in ten of non-violent girls (Artz 1998). The idea that girls' physical and sexual victimization

marks their trajectory toward violence is not new. Campbell (1984), as one example, also highlights the ways that gendered victimization frames girls' violence.

A new twist in patriarchy and gender inequality perspectives in the last decade has been to see girls' violence toward other girls as a form of horizontal violence – violence expressed toward members of the same group or other oppressed groups. Borrowing concepts from Freire (1970), Artz (1998), Brown (2003), and Morash and Chesney-Lind (2006) note that pervasive gender inequalities make it difficult, if not impossible, for girls to express anger and aggression (physical or indirect) toward boys and men, without, of course, dire consequences. Instead, girls take out their legitimate anger on other powerless girls (often with boys as the audience).

Emancipation and street liberation theorists contend that violent girls reject feminine norms and break into male dominant worlds. In contrast, the horizontal violence thesis views female violence as a result of vast and ever-present gender inequalities. In fact, empirical research on female violence suggests that offenders are, ironically, often quite committed to the 'ideology of familial patriarchy ... [that] supports the abuse of women who violate the ideals of male power and control over women' (DeKeseredy 2000, 46). Artz (1998) builds on that point by suggesting that violent girls more often than not 'buy-in' to traditional beliefs and 'police' other girls' behaviors, thus serving to preserve the status quo, including their own continued oppression. Artz et al. (2000, 31) also note this in their study of girls in custody in British Columbia, Canada. The researchers found that the majority of girls were male-focused, expressed hostility to other girls, and wanted very much to have boyfriends – always making sure that they had at least one, both in and out of jail. Vividly chronicling a 'no-win' situation for girls, the researchers note the many ways that horizontal violence set up girls to be targets. The power hierarchies among girls meant that girls could be targeted if they were 'too pretty' and thus risked becoming the center of boys' attention. Alternately, 'ugly' or 'dirty' girls (those designated as sluts) were also targets for girl-to-girl victimization because they 'deserved' to be beaten for their unappealing looks and for their gender-norm-violating behaviors.

Although powerful in moving beyond identifying essential differences between boys and girls, patriarchal interpretations of female violence have been critiqued. Miller (2001), for example, argues that gender difference theories focusing on gender inequality risk overemphasizing girls' and women's victimization and powerlessness. Her particular concern is that these perspectives place an 'overemphasis on women's gendered victimization – and with it, the accentuation of gender differences ...' In addition to portraying women and girls as 'hapless victims' without agency or culpability for their crimes, Miller suggests that gender difference perspectives tend to ignore other 'broader motives and rewards for involvement in crime'.

Beyond victimization: Violent girls as 'one of the guys'

Miller (2001) explains girls' offending in ways that take gender into account, while not overemphasizing gender differences. In essence, she articulates how gang girls and boys are the same as well as different. Based on research with female gang members in Columbus and St. Louis, Miller does acknowledge gender differences and that gender shapes much of girls' gang experiences. For example, girls, compared with boys, experienced more family victimization, and girls rarely occupied gang leadership positions, carried guns, or dealt drugs. In addition, pervasive beliefs of girls as 'soft' meant that they were not expected to fully engage in gang conflicts. Miller also notes girls' victimization in the gang. Some girls were 'sexed into the gang', announcing double standards in initiation practices. The stereotype of girls as 'weak' made girls seem easy targets, and girls were often punished for behaving in 'sexually inappropriate ways'.

While there were clear gender inequalities and pervasive victimization of girls (in and out of the gang), Miller argues against 'overemphasizing' these aspects of gang life. She offers two reasons not to overemphasize gender differences. First, she argues that gender's 'significance is variable' and depends on context. Thus, perspectives focusing on gender differences fail to offer a complete or whole picture of girls' lives in the gang and the reasons for their criminal participation. Second, Miller suggests that there are broader motives and processes than gender differences that shape both girls' and boys' experiences. Regarding this point, she notes that gender inequalities play a role, but girls' decisions '... are also patterned in important ways by larger dynamics within gangs such as group processes shaping notions of threat and respect' (p. 11). In addition, violence and crime allowed both girls and boys to 'be down' for their gangs and friends, retaliate against past transgressions, and protect gang territory. The most troubling similarity between girls and boys, to Miller, was the fact that gang girls, along with boys, perpetuated gender stereotypes of girls and women and applied double standards to girls' behavior. She argues that 'identifying with dominant beliefs about women while rejecting such images for themselves allowed many young women to construct themselves as "one of the guys" ... this allowed them to draw particular advantages from their gangs that were less available in other social spaces' (p. 198).

While Miller argues that patriarchy and gender inequality theories overemphasize gender differences, we believe that the 'one of the guys' thesis minimizes gender inequalities. For example, by suggesting that gender is variable and that its salience ranges by context, Miller imagines gender as being a flexible dynamic that comes to the fore in some contexts, and fades into the background during others. In addition to being flexible and ranging in salience, gendered processes such as victimization, sexual

double standards, and lack of leadership roles are seen as particular to girls. On the other hand, 'other forces' such as '... group processes shaping notions of threat and respect and the normative responses to such phenomena' are seen as broad and large gang motivations that boys and girls share (Miller 2001, 11).

We have some concerns about how gender and gender inequalities are positioned in the 'one of the guys' thesis. First, we question perspectives of female offending in which gender and gender inequalities are considered variable, while other forces are considered fixed and universally salient. We wonder if there is a way to view gender as equally 'fixed' and universal as other forces and inequalities. In our vision, gender is not less broad, or less universally relevant, than other experiences, inequalities, and systems of oppression. Second, we argue that gender inequalities, in addition to being broad and large, are also something that girls and boys share. After all, respect, status, retaliation, alienation, anger, and frustration are linked intimately to gender hierarchies, as well as to class and race oppression.

Arguing that gender's relevance is variable implies that girls' need for gender-specific services and interventions is also 'variable'. Similarly, emphasizing that girls and boys share 'broader' motives for crime than gender suggests that girls and boys will respond equally to interventions that target large and non-gender-specific criminal motivations. In our contemporary era of just deserts punishments, such a scheme promises gender parity with a vengeance. Because this vision downplays gender differences and plays up gender similarities, the need to focus on girls' and boys' shared culpability for crime will trump the need to attend to girls' victimization, unique needs, and circumstances. This is unfortunate.

Girls' code of the streets: Considering race, class, and gender

Jones (2004) and Ness (2004) also offer an image of girls' violence that attempts to bridge the 'similarities and differences' divide. Ness (2004) and Jones (2004) focus on low-income, inner-city girls of color and note that boys and girls participate in a violent 'code of the streets' (Anderson 1999) in parallel ways. Ness states that girls in distressed communities, similar to boys, find violence to be a 'source of pleasure, self-esteem, and cultural capital' (Ness 2004, 33). Ness further argues that violent girls in her study 'are not viewed as defying feminine norms ...' when they '... enjoy physically dominating others and take pleasure in inflicting pain and emerging victorious' (p. 45). In Ness's and Jones's work, violence is a means for girls to achieve powerful femininities and boys to achieve powerful masculinities within contexts where adolescents have a profound sense of being 'closed out of white, middle-class America and abandoned by the failing institutions meant to serve them' (Ness 2004, 36).

By arguing that violence is a means of achieving resilient femininities in distressed communities, Ness and Jones push past the street liberation

thesis offered by Baskin and Sommers. Instead of suggesting that urban realities make gender norms irrelevant, Ness and Jones argue that femininity remains central to women's and girls' lives and, more specifically, femininity can be altered to respond to race and economic inequalities. For example, Ness (2004, 37) argues that low-income, Hispanic and African American girls 'selectively appropriate' middle-class and white femininity norms (which eschew violence) and place them 'alongside values that more closely fit their lives'. Jones makes a similar argument when she outlines that being known as a good fighter is the most 'reliable social resource' available to girls in disadvantaged urban environments. Therefore, violent girls recraft, remake, and resolve femininities to attend to the contexts around them.

Similar to our concern with Miller's thesis, we wonder if there is a way to imagine gender as equally fixed as other inequalities and systems of oppression. In the girls' code-of-the-streets thesis, femininity is perceived as 'flexible' and 'variable' while other 'larger' and 'broader' forces, such as race and class inequalities, are imagined as fixed and central. Jones and Ness argue that gender is crafted and fashioned to attend to the class and race circumstances pressing down on boys and girls. Therefore, just as Miller, Ness and Jones imagine that boys and girls are equal in being left out of middle-class, white society. What makes them different, in this scheme, is how they craft and fashion their gender to attend to larger circumstances.

The media's fascination with the urban girl of color and her violence call for careful attention to how gender, class, and race inequalities play out in violence theories. At a time when popular representations of girls' violence reinforce the idea that girls are giving up their femininity and becoming just as violent as boys, we wonder what stereotypes might unintentionally emerge from viewing violent girls participating in a feminine 'code of the streets'. Our ultimate concern is that we will replace one set of problematic stereotypes with another. We specifically anticipate that at a time when violent men, especially working-class and poor young men of color, are seen as potentially violent and 'dangerously masculine', arguing that girls are the same as and different from boys will translate into a 'dangerously feminine' stereotype. Dangerously feminine girls are likely to be denied services attending to their unique circumstances. Such girls are also likely to be the targets of a punitive justice paradigm originally designed to combat male violence.

Context matters in girls' violence

Our primary concern with contemporary theories of girls' violence, especially efforts to get beyond the similarities/differences divide, is that they tend to push gender processes and inequalities to the sidelines, while foregrounding race, class, neighborhood, and peer processes. As we have

noted, gender and gender inequalities are viewed as variable in salience, unique to girls, flexible, and less broad than 'other' criminal motivations shared by girls and boys.

Building on the work detailed above, we argue that looking at the context of girls' violence allows us to combine key insights from gender similarities and gender differences perspectives in ways that do not marginalize gender inequalities. To do this, we must understand gender as a fixed component of a sex/gender system that organizes every context in which girls and boys grow up. In addition, we must acknowledge that gender is also flexible, negotiated, and achieved variously in different contexts, as West and Zimmerman (1987) articulate.

Acknowledging the fixed, broad, and pervasive aspects of gender means identifying a sex/gender system. The sex/gender system is one in which men have greater power than women, male power over girls and women can be expressed through physical and sexual domination, and girls and women lack the same opportunities afforded to boys and men. Girls' victimization in the family, among peers, and at school is a product of a universal sex/gender system. Similarly, school, neighborhood, and peer cultures that devalue and demoralize girls and women, while celebrating boys and men, are products of persistent inequalities in a sex/gender system. Understanding the context of girls' lives means understanding how girls grow up in a world where they are trivialized and sexualized and rewarded for being attractive to and dependent on boys. It also means understanding how girls are placed in direct competition with other girls for male approval and affirmation (Brown and Gilligan 1992; Orenstein 1994; Pipher 1994).

The sex/gender system in which girls and boys grow up has consequences for all adolescents. Large-scale gender inequalities, thus, are not simply something that girls share with girls or something located within and among girls. In contexts in which class and race inequalities make men vulnerable, the sex/gender system gives men an outlet to express power. It is not surprising that in such contexts women and girls become targets for men's and boys' attempts to assert control. By acknowledging that gender inequalities shape every context in which girls and boys grow up, we are not denying that adolescents are vulnerable to other inequalities, such as poverty and racism. We contend, though, that to fully understand community distress, disadvantage, or disorganization, scholars must understand that gender is one among many inequalities complicating childhood and adolescence.

Taking context into account also means understanding that gender is a flexible force that can be appropriated and shaped to fit complex realities. Here, as West and Zimmerman (1987) acknowledge, gender is an ongoing achievement. There are aspects of gender, therefore, that can be flexible, dynamic, and differentially constructed to attend to varying contexts. The flexibility of gender constructions in multiple contexts allows girls the

chance to construct a sense of femininity in multiple ways, even, as Miller (2001, 198) notes, in ways that allow girls to identify '... with dominant beliefs about women.' Morash and Chesney-Lind (2006) extend this idea by noting that girls' violence is multifaceted and multidimensional. Girls are violent to express anger at past victimization, defend themselves, or prevent future victimization. Violent girls also act out the pervasive gendered victimization around them. At the same time, girls are violent to express strength, power, and resilience. Girls' aggression can send a strong 'don't mess with me' signal to others. Violence, therefore, can be reactionary and proactive, instrumental and expressive, protective and retaliatory, rational and irrational. Girls' violence can result from pro-violence rationalizations, motives, and rewards received from friends, boyfriends, or family members. It can signal all the ways that girls are 'down for' their friends or their gang. On the other hand, some girls turn to violence to rebel against a preponderance of messages that violence is wrong, unfeminine, and relationally destructive. Here, girls' violence does not express how they are 'down for their friends' but to rebel against all the messages informing them that violence is unladylike. In this complex vision, the violent motivations that girls share with girls are not any less broad, variable, or salient than the motivations that girls share with boys.

Our emphasis on fixed as well as flexible aspects of gender and the need to understand that gender inequalities are equally as broad as other systems of oppression, comprises our effort to get beyond male-centered and masculinized perspectives. Specifically, we outline that there are fixed and universal gender inequalities that cut across all contexts (i.e., the sex/gender system) in which girls and boys grow up. These are large-scale, broad, and central, rather than marginal, concerns that need to be addressed when looking at adolescent violence. In addition, we also note that there are flexible and dynamic ways that gender is enacted in particular contexts (i.e., gender as achieved statuses). Above, we have argued that understanding the context of girls' violence will result in perspectives of girls as vulnerable within a sex/gender system as well as resilient in crafting strategies to maximize their power and self-protection in particular contexts. A complex analysis of the context of girls' violence, however, is not complete unless we also examine the policies and practices crafted in response to violent girls.

Masculinization and the jailing of girls

Gender similarities perspectives of girls' violence, particularly those articulated in the emancipation and street liberation perspectives, are problematic in many ways, not the least of which is that girls who are assumed to be 'like' their 'dangerous' male counterparts can be punished as if they were male. We are concerned that contemporary theories of girls'

violence that marginalize the significance of gender inequalities behind 'larger' criminal motivations that girls and boys share also risk continuing a problematic trend in criminal justice practice. One of the historic challenges, in our opinion, is that girls' unique circumstances are trivialized or ignored when girls are assumed to be like boys or when gender inequalities are assumed to be less important than and outside of broader criminal motivations.

In short, universal images of delinquency tend to support the notion that violent girls do not need gender-specific responses because their violence is caused by the same forces that cause boys' violence; then, by extension, the same programs that have been shown to be effective in curbing violence in boys will automatically work for girls. In other words, the dominant perception coming out of universal perspectives of delinquency is that it is okay to ignore girls or to give them the same services provided to boys.

One historic by-product of the universal and male-centered theories of delinquency is the masculinization of delinquency prevention and intervention services and the glaring lack of services for girls. In 1975, a Law Enforcement Assistance Administration report noted that only 5% of federally funded juvenile projects targeted girls and that girls received only 6% of local juvenile justice funds (Female Offender Resource Center 1977, 34). Twenty years later, the lack of services for girls remained a problem. A 1996 Girls Incorporated study, for example, found that only 2 out of 26 of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's promising programs were programs designed for girls, at a time when girls accounted for almost a third of all juvenile arrests (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2006). Even more ironic was the fact that there was one program identified to serve incarcerated teen fathers, while there was no program identified for incarcerated teen mothers (Girls Incorporated 1996). Reports from San Francisco (Siegal 1995), Washington, DC (Viner, personal communication, October 21, 2003), and Ohio (Holsinger et al. 1999), to name a few, corroborated this same trend. Delinquent girls continued to be 'out of sight, out of mind'. As Schaffner et al. (1996) note in their California detention study, detained girls tended to be overlooked and forgotten. The result was that they remained in detention, on average, far longer than boys, despite being charged with far less serious offenses. For example, 6% of boys were detained for more than 7 days, while 60% of girls were detained that long.

The invisibility of girl delinquency theories, particularly theories that explain the complexity of girls' violence, means they often receive interventions designed for boys. This can clearly be seen in the youth violence prevention field. The theories that underlie the 'best practices' for violence prevention programs draw from 'universal' theories of delinquency, and, thus, girls are rarely ever assumed to need unique prevention approaches. In the world of detained and incarcerated youths, the idea

that girls and boys are the same has often meant that girls receive programs and services that were designed for boys, such as outdoor sports and recreation activities. This trend continues, although research has found that these 'male-centered' programs given to girls are not only inappropriate for girls but are limited compared with what boys receive (Kersten 1989; Mann 1984).

Finally, the masculine violent girl stereotype makes the punishment of girls much more politically palatable. Sadly, public awareness of the masculine girl delinquent, particularly the urban girl, appeared at the same time as a peak in rampant public fears about 'superpredator' violent juveniles (see DiIulio 1995) and a national 'get tough on crime' criminal justice agenda. In the adult offending population, public fears about violent offenders have discouraged a response to crime that includes service provision and rehabilitation and moved toward a punishment-oriented system that relies on lengthy incarceration (see Garland 2001). A concomitant effect in the juvenile justice system has been what Chesney-Lind and Belknap (2004) call up-criming (criminalizing minor offenses) and re-labeling status offenses such as running away and incorrigibility as violent offenses such as assault or abuse of a family member.

The available statistics regarding girls in the juvenile justice system illustrate the effect of contemporary punitive policies on girls' lives. Since the 1980s, increases in girls' court referrals, detentions, and commitments have outpaced increases for boys. From 1985 to 2002, girls' juvenile court cases increased by 92%, while boys' court cases increased by 29% (Snyder and Sickmund 2006). Detention and commitment figures also showed steep increases in girls' incarceration for the first time since the de-institutionalization trends of the 1970s. From 1991 to 2003, the detention and commitment of girls increased by 98% and 88%, respectively, while boys' detention rate rose by 29% and their commitment rate rose by 23% (Snyder and Sickmund 2006). Looking closely at the nature of girls' court, detention, and commitment cases reveals a consistent story. Since the 1980s, girls have been increasingly entering the juvenile justice system for 'violent' or person offense, even though self and victim reports continue to show no actual increases in girls' violence. Astonishingly, the most recent data show a larger proportion of girls than boys in court for 'person' offenses; in 2002, 26% of female referrals but only 23% of male referrals to court were for 'person' offenses (Snyder and Sickmund 2006, 162).

In this paper, we have focused on one problematic turn in justice policy and practice; namely, how viewing girls as the same as boys facilitated the emergence of an era in which punishing girls as if they were boys became a politically acceptable project. In fact, the construction of youth, particularly girls of color, as hyperviolent, makes the dramatic increases we have seen in the detention and incarceration of girls, particularly girls of color, less controversial.

Conclusion

In this discussion, we have focused on two problematic developments in the girls' violence literature. The first is the persistence of the 'similarities/differences' problem in female offending theories. The similarities/differences problem captures the tendency of theories to explain how girls and women are either the 'same as' or 'different from' men or boys. The second problematic trend is the rise (and popularity) of a particularly troubling trend in gender similarities theories; namely, the proliferation of the masculinization hypothesis in criminological theory and popular culture. Since the 1960s and 1970s, female offenders have been described as being liberated from femininity and allowed to break into masculine criminal worlds. We also noted the recent media enthusiasm for such an explanation. Recall, though, that there is scant evidence that girls are actually committing more violence; indeed, most of the evidence that exists is to the contrary. There is, though, very strong evidence that certain women, particularly girls of color, are being constructed by the press and popular culture as dangerously masculine and violent. The function of such a construction is clear: to create a social and political climate that supports increasing imprisonment for these groups of girls and women. There is also the larger cultural message to all women that if they seek political and social equality with men, they risk losing the positive aspects of womanhood and developing some of the worst attributes of masculinity.

Given these two problems with theory development (i.e., the 'similarities/differences' problem and the masculinization thesis), we examined contemporary girls' violence scholarship. We looked at three developments, including theories of patriarchy and girls' violence, perspectives of gang girls as 'one of the guys', and works looking at girls' participation in a violent street code. We note that patriarchy and gender inequalities perspectives have been critiqued for overemphasizing girls' oppression and victimization, and proliferating images of girls as hapless and powerless victims. We feel that perspectives offered to get beyond girls' victimization, however, have minimized the role of gender inequalities. Our concern about theory construction is important given the dominance of the masculinization perspective in popular culture and criminal justice. We argue that how theorists attend to gender similarities and differences is consequential to how girls will be treated. Our concern is that logical imprecision will continue or exacerbate the troubling trend of viewing girls as dangerously masculine.

To construct a satisfying theory that does not overemphasize victimization or marginalize gender oppression, we offer a perspective of the context of girls' violence. We argue that there are both fixed and broad aspects of gender (i.e., a sex/gender system) that influence boys and girls. In addition, there are flexible components of gender. In the fixed sex/gender

system, gender inequalities provide overarching and broad motivations for crime and violence among girls and boys in ways that generally grant power and control to boys at the expense of girls. Within the flexible and achieved components of gender, girls and boys are able to 'fashion' their gender in various ways to fit and respond to larger contexts, including racism, classism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and ableism. Here, gender inequalities are not moved to the sidelines of theories and are one among many constraints that all youth confront and that make youth vulnerable. In addition, viewing gender as flexible accounts for differences among girls in various contexts. By placing gender inequalities back in the center of theories about how girls are the same as well as different from boys, we have an opportunity to view violent girls as deserving of interventions that attend to overarching and broad gender inequalities.

Our final contribution in this paper is to note that theories about girls' violence are consequential. Put plainly, our assumptions about violent girls' natures tend to predict the available services for and punishments leveled against girls. Because what we think about girls translates into how we control girls, we are particularly interested in examining ways that contemporary theorists attempt to move beyond the view that violent girls are essentially the same as boys. Clearly, we need more nuanced studies of the expression of aggression and violence in women and girls, and we need to divorce such studies from rigid conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity as individual attributes. Finally, male and female violence has to be understood from within the social context of patriarchy, as well as within systems of race privilege, heterosexism, and class privilege.

Short Biography

Katherine Irwin's research areas include juvenile delinquency, deviance, drug use, violence, youth culture, gender and crime, research methods, and delinquency prevention. In addition to recently co-authoring (with Meda Chesney-Lind) *Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence and Hype* (Routledge 2007), she has authored and co-authored papers in such journals as *Qualitative Sociology*, *Symbolic Interaction*, *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, *Youth and Society*, *Critical Criminology*, *Sociological Perspectives*, and *Sociological Forum*. She holds a BA in Sociology from Smith College and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and is currently an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She is also a principal investigator for the Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center at the John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Meda Chesney-Lind is Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her books include *Girls, Delinquency and Juvenile Justice* (Wadsworth 1992) and *The Female Offender: Girls, Women and Crime*

(Sage 1997). Her most recent book (co-authored with Katherine Irwin) is *Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence and Hype* (Routledge 2007). She has received numerous awards for her research on girls' and women's crime as well as her advocacy for criminalized girls and women. From the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences she received the Bruce Smith Sr. Award and has received the Donald Cressey Award from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. Within the American Society of Criminology, she has received the Women and Crime Division's Distinguished Scholar Award, the Division of Critical Criminology's Major Achievement Award, and the Herbert Block Award for service to the society and the profession. In 1996, she was named a fellow of the American Society of Criminology.

Notes

* Correspondence address: Department of Sociology, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Saunders Hall 247, Honolulu, HI 96822, USA. Email: kirwin@hawaii.edu

¹ Although violence is a broad category with numerous definitions, throughout this paper we describe violence in terms of categories used within the Uniform Crime Reports and self-report studies. When discussing overall violent arrest rates, violence includes aggravated assault, forcible rape, robbery, and homicide. Other assaults are also included in Uniform Crime Reports statistics, but are not measured within the violent crime index. Self-report studies include behaviors such as getting into a fight.

References

- Adler, Freda 1975. *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Anderson, Elijah 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Artz, Sibylle 1998. *Sex, Power, and the Violent School Girl*. Toronto, ON: Trifolium Books.
- Artz, Sibylle, Monica Blais and Diana Nicholson 2000. *Developing Girls' Custody Units*. Unpublished report.
- Baskin, Deborah, Ira B. Sommers and Jefferey Fagan 1993. 'Females' Initiation into Violent Street Crime.' *Justice Quarterly* **10**: 559–81.
- Blumstein, Alfred 1995. 'Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit-drug Industry.' *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology* **86**: 10–34.
- Bourgeois, Philippe 1996. 'In Search of Masculinity: Violence, Respect and Sexuality among Puerto Rican Crack Dealers in East Harlem.' *British Journal of Criminology* **36**: 412–427.
- Brown, Lyn Mikel 2003. *Girlfighting*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Brown, Lyn Mikel and Carol Gilligan 1992. *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development*. New York, NY: Ballantine.
- Campbell, Anne 1984. *The Girls in the Gang*. London, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1992–2006. *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 1991–2001*, CDC Surveillance Summaries. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Department of Health and Human Services.
- Chesney-Lind, Meda 2001. 'Are Girls Closing the Gender Gap in Violence?' *Criminal Justice* **16**: 18–23.
- Chesney-Lind, Meda and Katherine Irwin 2008. *Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence, and Hype*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Chesney-Lind, Meda and Joanne Belknap 2004. 'Trends in Delinquent Girls' Aggression and

- Violent Behavior: A Review of the Evidence.' Pp. 203–22 in *Aggression, Antisocial Behavior and Violence among Girls: A Developmental Perspective*, edited by Martha Putallaz and Karen L. Bierman. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Daly, Kathen and Chesney-Lind Meda 1988. 'Feminism and Criminology.' *Justice Quarterly* 5: 497–548.
- DeKeseredy, Walter 2000. *Women, Crime and the Canadian Criminal Justice System*. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson.
- Dilulio, John J. 1995. 'The Coming of the Super-Predators.' *The Weekly Standard* November 27, 23.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation 1996. *Crime in the United States 1995*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation 2000. *Crime in the United States 1999*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation 2006. *Crime in the United States 1999*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Female Offender Resource Center 1977. *Little Sisters and the Law*. Washington, DC: American Bar Association.
- Ford, Royal 1998. 'The Razor's Edge.' *Boston Globe Magazine* 13 (May 24), 22–8.
- Freire, Paulo 1970/1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Garbarino, James 2006. *See Jane Hit: Why Girls Are Growing More Violent and What We Can Do About It*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.
- Garland, David 2001. *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Girls Incorporated 1996. *Prevention and Parity: Girls in Juvenile Justice*. Indianapolis, IN: Girls Incorporated National Resource Center.
- Guido, Michelle 1998. 'In a New Twist on Equality, Girls' Crimes Resemble Boys'.' *San Jose Mercury* June 4, 1B–4B .
- Hirschi, Travis 1969. *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Holsinger, Kristi, Joanne Belknap and Jennifer L. Sutherland 1999. *Assessing the Gender Specific Program and Service Needs for Adolescent Females in the Juvenile Justice System*. Columbus, OH: A Report to the Office of Criminal Justice Services.
- Huizinga, David 1997. *Over-Time Changes in Delinquency and Drug Use: The 1970's to the 1990's*. Unpublished report. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Jones, Nikki 2004. "'It's Not Where You Live, It's How You Live": How Young Women Negotiate Conflict and Violence in the Inner City.' Pp. 49–62 in *Being Here and Being There: Fieldwork Encounters and Ethnographic Discoveries: Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, edited by Elijah Anderson, Scott N. Brooks, Raymond Gunn and Nikki Jones. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kersten, Joachim 1989. 'The Institutional Control of Girls and Boys.' Pp. 129–44 in *Growing Up Good: Policing the Behavior of the Girls in Europe*, edited by Maureen Cain. London, UK: Sage.
- Lee, Felicia R. 1991. 'For Gold Earrings and Protection, More Girls Take the Road to Violence.' *New York Times* November 25, A1.
- Lombroso, Cesare 1894. *The Female Offender*. London, UK: Fisher Unwin.
- Mann, Coramae Richey 1984. *Female Crime and Delinquency*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Miller, Jody 2001. *One of the Guys: Girls, Gangs, and Gender*. New York, NY: Oxford University
- Morash, Merry and Meda Chesney-Lind 2006. *Girls Violence in Context*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Girls Study Group Volume, edited by Margaret Zahn. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Ness, Cindy D. 2004. 'Why Girls Fight: Female Youth Violence in the Inner City.' Pp. 32–48 in *Being Here and Being There: Fieldwork Encounters and Ethnographic Discoveries: Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, edited by Elijah Anderson, Scott N. Brooks, Raymond Gunn and Nikki Jones. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Orenstein, Peggy 1994. *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap*. New York, NY: Anchor.

- Pipher, Mary B. 1994. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York, NY: Ballantine.
- Pollak, Otto 1961. *The Criminality of Women*. New York, NY: A.S. Barnes and Company.
- Prothrow-Stith, Deborah and Howard R. Spivak 2005. *Sugar and Spice and No Longer Nice: How We Can Stop Girls' Violence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schaffner, Laurie, Shelly Schick, Andrea D. Shorter and Nancy S. Frappier 1996. *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Plight of Girls in the San Francisco Juvenile Justice System*. San Francisco, CA: Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice.
- Siegal, Nina 1995. 'Where the Girls Are.' *San Francisco Bay Guardian* October 4, 19–20.
- Simon, Rita James 1975. *Women and Crime*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Snyder, Howard N. and Melissa Sickmund 2006. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report* (NCJ 178257). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Sommers, Ira and Deborah Baskin 1992. 'Sex, Race, Age, and Violent Offending.' *Violence and Victims* 7: 191–201.
- Sommers, Ira and Deborah Baskin 1993. 'The Situational Context of Violent Female Offending.' *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 30: 136–162.
- Steffensmeier, Darrell, Schwartz Jennifer, Hua Zhong and Jeff Ackerman 2005. 'An Assessment of Recent Trends in Girls' Violence Using Diverse Longitudinal Sources: Is the Gender Gap Closing?' *Criminology* 43: 355–406.
- Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi 2006. *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Viner, Elana 2003. Personal communication with the second author (Chesney-Lind on October 21).
- Wacquant, Loic 2001. 'Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh.' *Punishment and Society* 3: 95–134.
- West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman 1987. 'Doing Gender.' *Gender & Society* 1: 125–51.
- Wilson, William J. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, William J. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.