

Winter 1962

Comparison of the Delinquencies of Boys and Girls

Gordon H. Barker

William T. Adams

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gordon H. Barker, William T. Adams, Comparison of the Delinquencies of Boys and Girls, 53 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 470 (1962)

This Comment is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

COMPARISON OF THE DELINQUENCIES OF BOYS AND GIRLS*

GORDON H. BARKER AND WILLIAM T. ADAMS†

Essential to effective planning for the treatment and control of children in correctional institutions is an understanding of delinquent behavior. One aspect of such behavior insufficiently understood, as there have been few major studies on the point, concerns the behavioral differences between delinquent boys and delinquent girls. As a result, institutional personnel have had only a limited awareness of the specific needs of each group and of the need to differentiate between them in planning. The purpose of this study is to present a comparative analysis of the two delinquent populations, to discuss any significant differences, to theorize about these differences, and finally, to discuss any implications of this study.

In the State of Colorado there are two training schools for delinquent children—one for boys between the ages of 10 and 18, and one for girls between the ages of 10 and 21. The annual population of the boys' institution is four times that of the girls'.¹ This figure is consistent with national averages.

A thorough pre-parole case study is prepared on each boy and girl prior to his or her release from training school. The material used in the present study was derived from case studies so prepared during the fiscal year 1959-1960. During this period 77 case studies of girls were prepared, and

* Grateful acknowledgement is given to the Council on Research and Creative Work at the University of Colorado for financial assistance in the completion of the research.

† *Gordon H. Barker* is Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado. He is also Vice-President of the American Society of Criminology. Professor Barker has published numerous articles in this *Journal* and other scholarly periodicals. *William T. Adams* is Project Coordinator of the Interstate Research and Training Program in Juvenile Delinquency for the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. He has served as a member of the Colorado State Juvenile Parole Board since 1959. Mr. Adams was formerly Director of the Lookout Mountain School for Boys in Golden, Colorado.

¹The average population of the Boys School in Golden is 265 per month, and the average stay is seven months. The average population of the Girls School is 125 per month, and the average stay is 14 months. Four times more boys than girls are processed during one year. COLORADO STATE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, 39TH BIENNIAL REPORT—FISCAL YEARS 1958-1960, at 5.

all were used in this study; 324 case studies of boys were prepared during this period, and of these 126—a random sample—were used in this study. This random sample was not intended to be a matched sample, but rather a representative group of boys' cases.

Six categories of data available in the case summary material of both boys and girls were chosen for comparison. The six categories were: type of juvenile offense, family composition, incidence of personal disorganization in father, incidence of personal disorganization in mother, school placement, and residence in type of county. The social service staffs of the two institutions prepared the data after making a thorough perusal of the case studies.

The Chi Square test was applied to these data in order to determine if there were significant differences between the two groups. Although the Chi Square test is not as refined as other types, it did suit the data under scrutiny. The isolation of certain factors in this study seemed necessary due to the multiplicity of factors which are involved in the process of studying juvenile delinquency and in the etiology of delinquent behavior.

TYPES OF OFFENSES

The variety and frequency of the delinquent act are sometimes difficult to determine since often these facts are not recorded officially. In this study, however, such information was available in the case summaries referred to above, and an attempt was made to discover the nature of the delinquent act itself with regard to the two groups. Table I gives a clear picture of the differences which exist at a $P > .001$ level of significance.

These differences suggest a number of important implications. Boys, on the one hand, generally commit law violations through the acquisition of other people's property. They are involved in burglary, theft, robbery, and car theft in an alarmingly high number. Girls, on the other hand, are rarely apprehended in such delinquent acts. They are most likely to be committed to the training school for incorrigibility, sexual offenses, or running away from home. In most cases, all three

TABLE I. OFFENSES*

	Burglary	Incorrigibility	Sex Offenses	Running Away From Home	Other
Boys.....	80	10	5	20	40
Girls.....	8	58	27	23	5

$$\chi^2 (4 \text{ df}) = 133.18; p < .001$$

* N > 203 in this and other tables where more than one response was possible.

offenses are recorded against them on the court order which sends them to the training school. The other offenses for both boys and girls include arson, assault, vandalism, forgery, and narcotics.

In the mental hygiene approach to delinquency, the act is regarded as often expressive of an individual's need.² When the whole person is considered, the act becomes important for it suggests facets of the personality of the individual delinquent. In studying the offenses of the boys and girls in the context of their case studies certain points become apparent. Points of similarity are observed in the boys' cases which do not occur in the girls' cases, and other points of similarity are observed in the girls' cases which do not appear in the boys'. The dynamics of the behavior involved contribute to an understanding of the motivations involved in delinquency because the act often expresses needs.

Boys are involved in activities which they believe gain them status. In these activities they appropriate through illegal means goods which belong to others in order to bolster their own status in their group. The following are quotations from three case studies which typify this motivation.

"[H]e was involved in purse snatching, according to the Court report, when he was with the other boys who were somewhat older than he, and thus, he was implicated in a number of burglaries and larcenies which he actually did not participate in, but did accept the stolen money and did withhold information in these cases. L— is an inwardly anxious boy who has a great need to be accepted by the people around him, perhaps a stronger need due to the fact that he has a physical disability and thus, finds himself quite often a person who is trying to gain the respect and the favors

² For a concise statement of the mental hygiene approach in considering the act as symptomatic, see ROBISON, JUVENILE DELINQUENCY 9-12 (1960).

of older, stronger boys and unfortunately, in his case, these boys have been kids who have been in trouble and in Institutions for various delinquent acts."

"I guess that I felt that you just have more friends if you have a car but if you don't have a car, then most of them don't want to know you. You can go more places with a car. You can take out girls and do more things. I guess that I just like to drive a lot. . . . The kids I ran with were sort of like me. When I would run with them they would have me swipe the stuff so that they would never get caught. The reason that I did it was because I was afraid that if I didn't that I wouldn't have no one to run with. They just thought that I was that kind of person and I guess that they knew that I would do it. I still like them because I don't have no more other friends. The people in town would tell their kids not to run around with me. This one woman would see me with her son and she would tell me off. She would tell me not to hang around with her son. She didn't want him to steal. She told me not to come to her house again or she would call the cops."

"Bob was seen at the Children's Diagnostic Center on April 26, 1960. The impressions of both the Psychiatrist and the Psychologist were that the primary problems for this child were that he was struggling with his own masculine identification. On the one hand, he finds himself pressured into the masculine role, and on the other hand, he finds that when he adopts it, it becomes threatening. He is therefore confused about what is being expected and demanded of him as a child growing into manhood. His anger at the authorities who make these confusing demands of him is acted out through asserting himself in a masculine way, even though he remains uncertain and hesitant about the response that this may bring from others."

Boys frequently gain status by driving a stolen automobile or by having money to spend or by sporting stolen goods. They appear to be satisfying status needs not directly but through symbolic devices. One such device appears to be a masculine protest as observed in the last case quoted above. Boys' involvements in sex offenses are either less frequent or go unnoticed. Charges of incorrigibility do occur among the boys but not nearly as frequently as among the girls.

The delinquent acts which are most frequently

TABLE II. FAMILY COMPOSITION

	Complete	Mother Only	Mother/Step-Father	Other
Boys.....	45	37	16	28
Girls.....	29	21	10	17

$$\chi^2 (3 \text{ df}) = .11; p > .99$$

recorded for the youthful girl offender appear to be direct expressions of need gratification or hostility. There appear to be no status-gaining devices as in boys' cases. The girls act out directly through sexual misconduct, incorrigibility, or running away from home. Their expressions are a direct gratification of personal needs. Girls are generally alone in their delinquencies, whereas boys commit their offenses most frequently in groups.

FAMILY COMPOSITION

The composition of the family has always interested students of delinquency causation and control. Most people are convinced that there is a direct correlation between juvenile offenses and the disorganization of the composition of the family.³ Studies of institutionalized delinquents indicate that the majority of juveniles committed to state training schools come from highly disorganized and broken home settings.⁴ The figures in the present study verified expectations of a high incidence of broken homes for both groups of juvenile offenders. Table II shows no significant difference between the two groups as to family composition.

The implications, however, appear to be important. Approximately one-third of each group came from complete home settings. But of those children who were living with one parent only, the majority remained with their mothers. In cases of remarriage, most of the children were living with their natural mothers and step-fathers. The enormous impact of the lack of the natural father in the home setting is evident. The failure of the father either by his absence or deficiencies to act as a strong, supportive figure with whom the boy can identify has been frequently pointed out as a

³ For a discussion of one aspect of family life and delinquency, see Gardner, *Separation of the Parents and the Emotional Life of the Child*, in S. GLUECK, *THE PROBLEM OF DELINQUENCY* 138 (1959).

⁴ See, e.g., ADAMS & BARKER, *THE INSTITUTIONALIZED DELINQUENT—EXPLORATORY STUDIES OF BOYS IN A CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION* (1959).

causal factor in the development of anti-social feelings and delinquent behavior among youthful males.

A significant number of girls were also living in homes without their natural fathers. The natural mother remained in 60 of the 66 girls' cases. Normally, the girl identifies with the natural mother and thus learns feminine role identifications and functions. Our study suggests, however, that lack of a strong, supportive and protective father has an adverse effect on the adolescent girl which is significant for understanding girls' delinquencies.⁵

From the case studies themselves, interpretative statements can be made. The failure of a strong father as the central controlling force in the family status system as well as in the discipline system has adverse effects on the girls. In some cases, it seems, girls fail to perceive the normal male-female role functions in their families and as a result seek a solution to their uncertainties through sexual acting out. In other cases, their sexual misbehavior and incorrigibility might be explained by reaction formations—their hatred of the male because he has deserted the mother in some cases and in others because the girl may have noticed cruelty, abuse, and weakness in the father when he did live in the family unit. In still other cases, girls may have developed hatred of the males because of unpleasant experiences with step-fathers—another type of reaction formation. Sometimes the sexual delinquency appears to be a means of self-punishment due to deep feelings of guilt or inadequacy. The failure of girls to have had a positive, strong, and supportive relationship with their fathers may have many different meanings and results in their behavior. The following excerpt is suggestive of some of the behavior as interpreted herein:

"Mary is one of six children, three brothers and two sisters. The parents are together. The father is a laborer who is very irregular in employment. He often follows carnivals as a roustabout in the summers. The family has lived in the automobile during these months. Both parents drink. The father beats the mother and children while drunk. The family is of the lowest standards, even being rejected by their fellow carnival workers. Both parents told the psychiatric worker at Diagnostic Center they felt overwhelmed by their family,

⁵ For an analysis of roles in the family, see PARSONS & BALES, *FAMILY, SOCIALIZATION AND INTERACTION* 309-20 (1955).

especially when Mary began acting out. . . . The mother is subservient to the father, and tends to become ill or faint when pressures are too great. The father tried to correct Mary by severe whippings. However, he encouraged her sexual acting out. . . . The family had been in the County less than six months when the community stepped in because of Mary's brazen sexual behavior pursuing boys until it was necessary to exclude her from school."

PERSONAL DISORGANIZATION AMONG PARENTS

The case summaries which were prepared at the training schools contained information concerning family background and relationships. From these data information was secured about the parent figures and the role personnel within the family social structure. Such information in these areas of relationships indicates any possible personal disorganization of the parent figures. Such a study is difficult because such information is not as readily available as other facts. Often it is an interpretive response from a social worker, a court official, or another agency person. In some cases the fact of disorganization was reported by the juvenile himself. Hence the reliability of such data is more questionable than the material previously presented.

Tables III and IV reveal no significant differences between the two groups. Table III records statements about the incidence of personal disorganization among the fathers. Very few fathers of either the boys or the girls were recorded as "adequate," in the sense that no remarks about limiting disabilities or disturbing factors were made in the cases. There was much evidence of excessive drinking, desertion, chronic unemployment, incarceration in a mental institution or prison, and chronic marital difficulties as evidenced in the father's frequent marriages. It is notable that such

TABLE III. STATEMENTS ABOUT DISORGANIZATION AMONG THE FATHERS

	Ade-quate	Alco-holic	De-serted Family	M.H. or Prison, Marital Discord, Unk.	Unem-ployed	Dead
Boys.	22	30	24	31	24	21
Girls.	19	9	13	21	15	12

χ^2 (5 df) = 5.12; p > .30

TABLE IV. STATEMENTS ABOUT DISORGANIZATION AMONG THE MOTHERS

	Ade-quate	Alcoholic, Deserted, Marital Discord	Weak, Inade-quate	Dead, M.H. or Prison, Unk.
Boys.	31	28	63	16
Girls.	24	25	32	8

χ^2 (3 df) = 3.42; p > .30

personal disorganization appeared to a comparable degree in cases of both boys and girls.

Table IV tabulates the statements about disorganization among the mothers of the two groups, showing a very high rate of disorganization among the female heads of the homes. Most of them were considered weak and inadequate figures by either the children themselves or agency officials. But a higher number was found adequate in both groups than was the case with the fathers. More of the children were left to live with their natural mothers than with their natural fathers, and the lack of effectiveness in control and discipline among the mothers had an enduring effect on the children, it would appear from the resulting delinquencies. The failure of the father to act as the central head of the home also seems pertinent to the difficulties which these children had in their development of sexual identifications and expressions of their problems. The under-the-roof situation is undoubtedly a very important one for the youthful offender who ultimately finds himself committed to a state training school.⁶

SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

The school is one of the most important social systems for the adolescent in the United States. The controls and systems of demands and expectations are very great in the school experience for both boys and girls. There is a high correlation between school failure and problems and the acts of delinquency.⁷ Most of the youthful offenders in correctional institutions have had long histories of school difficulties. Recent research has demonstrated that delinquents are not necessarily lower in intelligence than non-delinquents, but they do

⁶ For an explanation of the "under-the-roof culture," see S. & E. GLUECK, UNRAVELING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY 115-16 (1950).

⁷ For a careful study of the role of the school, both in contributing to and cooperating with delinquency, see KVARACEUS, JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND THE SCHOOL (1945).

TABLE V. THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

	Grades: 5, 6, 7, & 8	Grades: 9, 10, & 11	Drop Out
Boys.....	62	16	48
Girls.....	20	17	40

$$\chi^2 (2 \text{ df}) = 11.07; p < .01$$

seem to have a greater degree of educational retardation, and school drop-out rates are extremely high among the delinquent population.⁸

Table V reveals a significant difference between the two groups in one major respect—that of school drop-outs. The girls have a far higher rate of failure to remain in school than do the boys. There may be several explanations for this fact. The girls' delinquent acts have been noted as a direct expression of need gratification and expression of hostility. The striking out of the girls in a direct line against authority, the home, and themselves would frequently make them more noticeable in their misbehavior. Boys' aggressions appear to be more culturally acceptable than those of girls. The girls appear to rebel against the school system in such a way that the schools will not tolerate them; the girls are then rebuffed either by actions of the administrative staff or of other pupils through group pressure. That many of the girls have run away from home or become pregnant out of wedlock is a further partial explanation.

Moreover, there are cultural and occupational pressures on boys to remain in school even though considerable retardation does exist. Society places fewer demands on the female adult—she is not required by the culture to be the bread-winner for example, and hence a girl has less pressure with respect to adult expectancies than does a boy.

Although the girls find it more difficult to remain in school than do the boys, they apparently have less educational retardation.⁹ The age distribution was essentially the same for both groups,¹⁰ and more girls than boys had advanced to higher grades in this study.

TYPES OF COUNTIES REPRESENTED

Whether the juvenile offender comes from an urban or rural setting has always had important meaning for the sociologist.¹¹ The counties of the

⁸ This situation is referred to in the 39TH BIENNIAL REPORT, *op. cit. supra* note 1, at 20-21.

⁹ *Id.* at 21.

¹⁰ Although the age range at the girls' training school extends to 21, there were no girls in the population over 18.

¹¹ For one such study, see TEETERS & REINEMANN, *THE CHALLENGE OF DELINQUENCY* 154-57 (1950).

TABLE VI. COUNTIES

	Urban	Semi-Urban	Rural	Semi-Rural
Boys.....	67	26	12	21
Girls.....	24	28	9	16

$$\chi^2 (3 \text{ df}) = 10.27; p < .02$$

State of Colorado have been divided into four categories by the 1960 Colorado White House Conference on Children and Youth.¹² The four categories designated therein are urban, semi-urban, semi-rural, and rural. These have been used in this study to designate the counties throughout the state which have juvenile offenders in the State Training Schools.

Table VI shows significant differences between the boys and girls as to their places of residence in urban or rural counties. The majority of boys came from urban and semi-urban areas, whereas the majority of girls came from semi-urban and semi-rural communities.

There are several possible explanations for this urban-rural differential in the delinquencies of boys and girls. One explanation may be that the nature of the girls' delinquent acts tends to make the girls particularly noticeable in the smaller community. Certainly it appears that there are closer social controls and stronger public sanctions in small communities than in the larger, more impersonal urban areas. In other words, the girls' sexual acting-out and incorrigibility are met with stronger sanctions in rural communities than in urban areas. Apparently it is felt that the delinquent girl, because of the nature of her delinquencies, is more offensive to the morality of the community than the delinquent boy. Hence there are greater pressures to remove the girl from the rural community because of the nature of her delinquencies than there are to remove the boy, whose delinquencies are generally committed in a group and involve such acts as burglary and car thefts. Apparently these acts are considered less immoral than the girls' delinquent acts, with the result that the less urban communities tend to commit an excess of girls.

Another possible explanation of the urban-rural differential is that delinquent boys in urban areas are almost always sub-cultural delinquents.¹³ In

¹² GOVERNOR'S COMM. FOR THE 1960 WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH, *COLORADO'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH* (1960).

¹³ For a thorough discussion of the delinquent sub-culture, see A. K. COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS* (1955).

the Colorado Boys School, the majority of the delinquents are of Latin American background—an ethnic group which is a minority in the total state population. There are surprisingly few urban girls of this same ethnic background in the Girls Training School. As part of the sub-cultural delinquent pattern, boys in urban areas tend to form gangs more often than do girls, and hence are more easily apprehended. Also, as noted before, greater cultural demands are made on boys than on girls, most often in terms of their future roles in the communities. This tends to foster greater competitiveness among boys than among girls for acceptance in the communities as well as in the schools. Still another point is that the sex delinquencies of girls are less noticeable in large urban areas than in small rural areas. There are more facilities for the girls' pregnancies and other delinquencies than there are facilities for dealing with the delinquencies of boys in urban areas.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The data in this study reveal some very clear cut differences between girl offenders and boy offenders in Colorado Training Schools. These differences have been indicated and attempts at explanations have been made. The differential nature of the delinquent behavior appears to be the most significant finding in this study and is the key to understanding many facets of the causation of anti-social behavior, wherever it is found.

There are significant differences as well as significant similarities between these two groups of delinquents. Girls express their inner conflicts and anger in a direct manner, whereas boys who are seeking identification and acceptance as well as an expression of their masculinity seem to launch their protests through group misbehavior calculated to gain status through various devices. It would appear that the girls' problems warrant different solutions and approaches toward treatment and rehabilitation than those of the youthful boy offenders. Research into the personality dynamics of these two groups would give some very valuable clues to programming for the two groups.

The factor of similar family backgrounds is indeed noteworthy. More emphasis should be placed upon bringing competent male social workers, psychologists, therapists, and teachers into both institutions. The tradition in the Girls Training Schools has been to exclude male personnel all too often. There appears to be some change in this re-

gard in some training schools in this country. Guidance and counseling within the school should emphasize some of the meaningful problems in marital relations and marriage and family education. Family case work while the youth is in the training school is sorely needed; strengthening the adult family roles of the parents of the institutionalized delinquent is a necessity. One major emphasis in therapy is to give the boy or girl a new perspective about his parents in their various roles. Many of the girls will eventually be mothers, if they are not already, and a great deal of counseling in this area is vital, as the youthful offender needs to have substance in his expectations concerning future roles and life problems.

It is necessary to strive to instill in the delinquent youth more positive goals and self-images. It is apparent, that different methods of group therapy should be employed to reflect the differences between the girls' and boys' self-concepts. Girls seem to have a more negative self-concept than boys. They feel more rejected and tend to identify less with each other than do boys. They tend to perceive of themselves as relatively isolated individuals.

For those many youths who have become school drop-outs, community programming is vital in order to give them meaningful roles and to help them avoid the propensity toward becoming drifting, anchorless youngsters with no real sense of purpose or constructive channels for their energies.¹⁴

Training schools must provide the kind of moratorium described in the following quotation from Margaret Mead: "... but such search and such commitments are possible only if the society is willing to extend to young people in their late adolescence, a kind of psychological moratorium (as Erickson has called it) during which they can experience youth without being called upon to succeed, and *as if*, in which heights and aspirations and depths of despair can both be experienced without final economic, social, or personal psychological consequences."¹⁵ In this sense the training schools should be a place where children can explore themselves and their world and approach some sense of meaning and self-worth.

¹⁴ The protest of the delinquent against society is described in Heckscher, *The New Leisure*, in 1 THE NATION'S CHILDREN 245 (Ginzberg ed. 1960).

¹⁵ Mead, *Problems of the Late Adolescent and Young Adult*, in CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE 1960'S 8 (Survey Papers Prepared for the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth, 1960).