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# CRIMINOLOGY

## "DELINQUENCY IS STILL GROUP BEHAVIOR!": TOWARD REVITALIZING THE GROUP PREMISE IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE\*

MAYNARD L. ERICKSON\*\* AND GARY F. JENSEN\*\*\*

One of the fundamental notions in the original development of the sociological study of delinquency was the notion that "delinquency is a group phenomenon," meaning that the context and major referents of delinquent behavior involve adolescent groups. This "group premise" was in fact one of the major justifications for sociological claims to the field. Moreover, the most popular theoretical works on delinquency through the mid-1960's took "gangs" and "delinquency subcultures," or "contracultures," as their main unit of analysis.<sup>1</sup> In short, the very subject matter of the sociology of delinquency was its group characteristics.

However, since the mid-1960's there has been a movement away from "the study of gangs" to a focus on delinquent "behavior" or "acts."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. CLOWARD & L. OHLIN, *DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY* (1960); A. COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS* (1955); Cloward, *Illegitimate Means, Anomie, and Deviant Behavior*, 24 AM. SOC. REV. 164 (1959); Miller, *Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency*, 14 J. SOC. ISSUES 5 (1958).

<sup>2</sup> T. HIRSCHI, *CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY* (1969); Hindelang, *The Commitment of Delinquents to Their Misdeeds: Do Delinquents Drift?*, 17 SOC. PROB. 502 (1970); Hindelang, *Age, Sex and the Versatility of Delinquency Involvements*, 18 SOC. PROB. 522 (1971); Hirschi & Stark, *Hellfire and Delinquency*, 17 SOC. PROB. 202 (1969); Jensen, "Crime Doesn't Pay": *Correlates of a Shared Misunderstanding*, 17 SOC. PROB. 189 (1969); Jensen, *Delinquency and Adolescent Self-Concepts: A Study of the Personal Relevance of Infraction*, 20 SOC. PROB. 84 (1972); Jensen, *Parents, Peers and Delinquent*

Such a shift has been supported by the observation that the emphasis on gangs, subcultures, roles and careers "prematurely and unnecessarily restrict[s] the study of delinquency to small segments of the population . . ."<sup>3</sup> Delinquent behavior is distributed more pervasively in the social structure than in lower-class male delinquent gangs and is more readily measured through survey techniques. Thus, most current empirical studies focus on delinquent behavior regardless of its group or individual nature. With the demise of the subcultural perspectives, the group premise (which does not require exclusive focus on gangs) has been forgotten or ignored.

Not only has empirical work come to concentrate on individualistic action, but the delinquency theories which inherited the field from subcultural theory, primarily labelling and deterrence theories, have yet to explicitly encompass the group premise in their perspectives or to fully explore its implications for their arguments.<sup>4</sup> Any theorist is free to stipulate those

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*Action: A Test of the Differential Association Hypothesis*, 78 AM. J. SOC. 562 (1972); Waldo & Chiricos, *Perceived Penal Sanction and Self-reported Criminality: A Neglected Approach to Deterrence Research*, 19 SOC. PROB. 522 (1972); Williams & Gold, *From Delinquent Behavior to Official Delinquency*, 20 SOC. PROB. 209 (1972).

<sup>3</sup> T. HIRSCHI, *supra* note 2, at 52-53.

<sup>4</sup> Three theoretical perspectives seem to hold center stage: labelling, deterrence and radical criminology. See Gibbs & Erickson, *Major Developments in the Sociological Study of Deviance*, 1 ANN. REV. SOC. 21 (1975), for a review of recent developments.

Several theorists have begun to "hint" at ways in which group notions could be incorporated into labelling and deterrence theories. For example, Thorsell and Klemke point out that labelling analyses stress "the importance of the impact of societal reaction on the deviant person rather than focusing upon his psychological or sociological characteristics." They then go on to suggest factors which can shape the impact of labelling, such as, deviant career stage, confidentiality, attitude towards labellers, perma-

phenomena which are relevant, and each may simply deny the relevance of the group nature of delinquency or leave it to the reader to guess its role. Yet thus far, labelling and deterrence theorists have not declared the group premise to be outside the domain of relevant phenomena. Instead, they appear simply to have forgotten that premise in order to emphasize other variables, such as "deviant identity," "secondary deviance" and "self-conceptions" (in the case of labelling theorists), or "perceived risks" and "costs" of deviance to individuals (in the case of deterrence theory). Each tends to focus on the actor's response to potential and actual sanctions and labels.

The major purpose of this article, however, is not to criticize those theories which currently hold center stage in delinquency and deviance research; its purpose is merely to suggest that an important observation is being neglected both theoretically and empirically. While the claim that delinquency is a group phenomenon has been propounded since at least 1927, very little is known about the complete scope of the premise.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, unless the issue is revitalized in the sociology of deviance, little more will be known. The current investigation at-

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nency of the label, societal reaction to labels and prevalence of labels. While there are hints suggesting the importance of group context the issue is never directly addressed. Thorsell & Klemke, *The Labelling Process: Reinforcement and Deterrent?*, 6 L. Soc'y Rev. 393 (1972).

Even more recently Tittle suggests specifications of labelling and deterrence theory in terms of types of norms, characteristics of offenders, characteristics of sanctions, the kind of behavior involved, diffusion of sanction effects, career stage, community context and perceptual dimensions of sanctions. Again, the group nature of delinquency may be *implicit* in such theoretical specifications of current theory but it is rarely, if ever, dealt with directly. Tittle, *Deterrents or Labeling?*, 53 Soc. FORCES 399 (1975).

<sup>5</sup> The complete scope of the phrase "delinquency is a group phenomenon" has never been explicated. However, no matter how narrow the scope is taken to be, it includes within its meaning the claims that (1) most delinquent acts are social events involving several individuals—the so-called group context of the behavior, and (2) one of the most important sources of motivation and support for engaging in delinquent conduct is peer groups. In the present study, "group delinquency" or "group violation rates" will be used to refer to delinquent behavior (i.e., violation of legal rules by juveniles) that occurs in the company of others. For a summary review of early studies relevant to the group premise, see Erickson, *The Group Context of Delinquent Behavior*, 19 Soc. PROB. 114 (1971).

tempts to explore one aspect of the group premise—the group properties of delinquent acts—and to illustrate how current perspectives could be given new vitality and direction if peer group phenomena were more explicitly integrated into such theories.

#### PAST RESEARCH

Even though a vast amount of official data has been cited to support the view that delinquency is group behavior,<sup>6</sup> only a few basic questions concerning the issue can presently be answered. The cumulative data on the group nature of delinquent acts suggests that (1) although group violation rates vary among acts, there are very few acts (primarily offenses related to "incurable" behavior, such as running away and defiance of parents) where offenses occur as often alone as in group context;<sup>7</sup> (2) official sources of data overestimate by approximately 20% the amount of group violations;<sup>8</sup> and (3) there is little or no significant variation between socio-economic status categories, in terms of the *pattern of group violations* among acts, and the absolute levels of group violation rates.<sup>9</sup>

At present, one cannot answer with confidence the most basic questions concerning the group premise: Is there a relatively constant underlying social property ("groupness") of various types of delinquent action? Are the group properties of delinquent acts constant by gender? Are they constant from community to community? Can the patterns noted in data collected in the early 1960's be found in data collected in the mid-1970's? More generally, is the group premise applicable over time and space?

#### STUDY DESIGN

In an attempt to answer these questions unofficial data is used; namely, self-reports of high school students in four southern Arizona communities which vary considerably in terms of size, dominant industry and industrial diver-

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 114–15.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 114–29; M. GOLD, *DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR IN AN AMERICAN CITY* 82 (1970).

<sup>8</sup> Erickson, *supra* note 5; Erickson, *Group Violations and Official Delinquency: The Group Hazard Hypothesis*, 11 CRIMINOLOGY 127 (1973).

<sup>9</sup> Erickson, *Group Violations, Socio-economic Status and Official Delinquency*, 52 Soc. FORCES 41 (1973).

sity. The urban community is a "standard metropolitan statistical area" with a population of about 400,000 and an economy oriented around mining, manufacturing, tourism, a military base, and a university. The three smaller communities, whose populations range from 1200 to 8000, encompass a "mining" town, a "tourist" town and a town commonly depicted as a "ranching" community.

As part of a larger project involving adults, police and adolescents, questionnaires were administered to a total of 1700 high school students (53% male, 47% female). This number included 427 students (51% male, 49% female) from three small-town high schools and 1273 students (54% male, 46% female) from three high schools in the urban community. Questionnaires were administered in either a classroom or cafeteria setting by project staff subject to variable restrictions set by each school administration. The three small-town high schools, which required signed parental consent for a student to take part in the study, yielded samples of between 25% and 35% of the student population.<sup>10</sup> The urban schools allowed the questionnaire to be administered in social studies and English classes, resulting in samples of approximately 50% of each school's population. Two of the urban schools allowed parents to "excuse" students from participating, although very few did so, while the third urban school encouraged all students to complete the questionnaire. In all cases, steps were taken to assure students that participation

<sup>10</sup> A number of observations should be made concerning the possible effects of these procedural differences. If significant urban-rural differences are in fact found, then *one* explanation might be that group delinquencies were underestimated in the *written* parental consent samples as compared to the less restricted urban samples. If stability and agreement are found, it would be difficult to argue that the procedural difference eliminated differences that would have been there otherwise. Moreover, since there are three rural samples with identical restrictions and three urban samples with their own constant set of restrictions, stability and variation can be assessed *within* these sets as well as between. Finally, it should also be noted that where comparisons were possible, there was a close correspondence between data on parental occupation and education and on the occupational structure and educational attainment of the populace according to the 1970 census. Even measures of delinquency based on juvenile court reports for the two counties involved parallel findings.

was strictly voluntary and the questionnaires anonymous.<sup>11</sup>

The group violation rates (GVR) were measured similarly to earlier research by asking subjects how many times during the last twelve months they had committed each of a variety of delinquent acts and then how many of these times they were with others.<sup>12</sup> The acts encompass eighteen offenses which could result in adjudication as a delinquent or an incorrigible in the state of Arizona. Ten of the eighteen acts are comparable to those utilized in earlier studies, thus allowing comparisons between studies as well as among the different schools, communities and sub-groups in the present study.

#### FINDINGS

The frequency of self-reported group violations (Freq.) and group violation rates (GVR) for the eighteen delinquent acts are summarized in Table I for the six high school samples. As in prior research, considerable variation was found in the proportion of acts committed in the company of peers. In general, drunkenness, drinking and use of marijuana are most likely to be group activities. Between 84% and 98% of self-reported drunkenness incidents were reported to have been committed in the company of others, as were between 81% and 91% of drinking incidents and between 86% and 92% of incidents of marijuana use. Such a pattern is quite consistent with what is commonly known about the social and recreational nature of these activities. Group violation rates were also high for the use of other illicit drugs, ranging between 71% and 84%. Other acts which ranked relatively high in terms of group violation rates were burglary and vandalism.

<sup>11</sup> No code numbers were used and teachers were asked to either leave the room or to leave the administration of the questionnaire entirely to the staff. Students were allowed to exchange questionnaires before answering in order to alleviate suspicions of secret codes and were told to place their own questionnaires in the collection boxes when completed.

<sup>12</sup> Group violation rates refer to the proportion (%) of violations that are known to or reported to have been violated in the company of others. For convenience the formula is simply:  $GVR = GV/TV \times 100$ , where GVR = group violation rates; GV = acts committed in the company of others; TV = total violations; and 100 simply removes the decimal point.

TABLE I  
GROUP VIOLATION RATES (GVR)<sup>a</sup> BY SCHOOL SUBSAMPLES

Setting	Urban						Small Town						Totals	
	Western		Parochial		Central		Mining		Tourist		Ranch		GVR	Freq.
	GVR	Freq.	GVR	Freq.	GVR	Freq.	GVR	Freq.	GVR	Freq.	GVR	Freq.		
Drunk	91	8573	92	6026	94	5008	94	6135	84	1304	98	1113	93	28159
Drinking	90	14065	90	11154	91	7119	90	9499	81	2034	88	1744	90	45615
Marijuana	86	9495	92	6031	87	7778	87	9257	90	2510	90	1801	88	36872
Drugs	81	1515	76	497	83	1700	84	1842	71	409	72	150	80	6113
Vandalism	79	455	80	370	91	362	75	257	68	54	90	34	80	1532
Burglary	78	722	74	128	76	88	85	118	78	11	71	27	78	1094
Auto theft	70	104	58	52	77	52	59	82	50	9	43	5	64	304
Truancy	69	6887	64	765	66	4318	75	1483	59	236	69	169	68	13858
Grand theft	68	158	48	10	78	54	60	14	-	-	81	10	66	246
Smoking	64	10032	76	6286	64	5450	64	6531	61	3007	63	2496	67	33802
Armed robbery	64	123	33	2	100	1	54	9	50	1	100	1	57	137
Robbery	62	124	40	60	33	3	54	37	75	7	25	1	52	232
Petty theft	60	610	54	211	64	236	49	135	53	25	28	14	55	1231
Shoplifting	46	953	55	582	46	399	51	778	42	113	43	44	50	2869
Runaway	36	31	30	15	44	370	33	9	14	2	38	6	34	433
Assault	28	552	32	31	18	16	19	26	31	4	12	3	25	632
Defy parents	26	1652	26	2318	25	1301	24	3213	29	75	38	215	26	8774
Fights	22	154	26	121	18	66	13	49	25	16	23	7	20	413

<sup>a</sup> Proportion of acts reported to have been committed in the company of peers.

Some acts by the very nature of the setting and circumstances in which they occur are likely to be individual acts and rank low in terms of group violation rates. For example, defying parents (incorrigibility), is likely to involve the individual adolescent acting alone in a stance contrary to parents. Similarly, running away from home is likely to be an individual action. These low group violation rates do not indicate that peer relationships are irrelevant to such actions. An adolescent's peer group may be an ultimate source of conflict with parents and a retreat from the home situation even though the act is committed alone.

Two other offenses were uniformly low in group violation rates: assault and fights. Obviously, these offenses by nature involve more than one person; however, the questionnaire asked whether anyone was "helping" the adolescent. At least in terms of self-reports, beating up or hurting someone intentionally and getting into fights are likely to be individual conflicts.

The most striking finding for the six subsamples is the similarity in group violation rates for each act relative to other acts. As summarized in Table II, the rank order correlations of all acts in terms of group violation rates for all pairs of schools range between .63 and .97. The coefficient of concordance (a summary measure of overall concordance in rank orderings) is .85 and statistically significant beyond the .001 level. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that there is a stable *order* to these acts in terms of the particular underlying group property being examined.

Not only is there a good deal of stability in the rank ordering of the acts but the *levels* of actual group violation rates are also quite similar. For example, in Table I there are 265 sample-by-sample differences in group viola-

tion rates for the eighteen acts, and of these, only thirty-six (13.6%) were greater than 20%. In fact, 64% of the differences were less than or equal to 10%. Of course, there was greater variation for some acts than others. Whether one considers differences greater than 10% or greater than 20%, it appears that one-third of the acts account for most such differences. Armed robbery, robbery, auto theft, vandalism, petty theft and grand theft accounted for 92% of the differences greater than 20% and 62% of the differences greater than 10%. There were *no* differences greater than 20% for eleven of the eighteen acts. Several of the most variable acts are very rarely committed; hence the group violation rates should be very unstable from sample to sample, as the most disparate group violation rates tend to occur when comparing samples with very low frequencies of involvement. Thus, for 265 tests of significance involving group violation rates for pairs of schools, only thirty-four were statistically significant at the .05 level. The average difference for all 265 comparisons was only 14%. Removing armed robbery from the computation above reduces the average difference to only 9%. In sum, there is considerable stability in the rank order of offenses in terms of group violation rates and there are rarely any significant differences from sample to sample in the magnitude of such rates.

#### GROUP VIOLATION RATES BY GENDER

While delinquent behavior has been typically viewed as a male phenomenon, this image is even more prominent in depictions of gangs and group delinquency. Traditionally, gangs of adolescent males have most concerned the public and, until recently, have received the most attention in sociological criminology. However, together with an apparent rise in female criminality and a growing concern with sex roles and their influence on behavior, female "gangs" have been receiving increasing notoriety.<sup>13</sup> Since earlier research on group violations, and virtually all on delinquency, has been limited to males, very little is known about the "groupness" of female delinquency.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., F. ADLER, *SISTERS IN CRIME* (1975).

<sup>14</sup> In his 1960 data, Gold does report that sex, age and race made little difference for acting alone. M. GOLD, *supra* note 7, at 91.

TABLE II

RANK ORDER CORRELATIONS (Rho's) BETWEEN  
GROUP VIOLATION RATES (GVR) FOR PAIRS OF  
SCHOOL SUBSAMPLES<sup>a</sup>

	Western	Central	Mining	Tourist	Ranch
Parochial	.92	.71	.93	.88	.69
Western		.86	.97	.88	.80
Central			.79	.65	.95
Mining				.91	.79
Tourist					.63

<sup>a</sup> Coefficient of concordance = .86.

TABLE III  
GROUP VIOLATION RATES (GVR) BY COMMUNITY AND GENDER<sup>a</sup>

	Urban				Small Town			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	GVR	Frequency	GVR	Frequency	GVR	Frequency	GVR	Frequency
Drunk	91	13535	94	6072	93	5561	94	2991
Drinking	86	22036	95	10302	86	8684	92	4593
Marijuana	85	15075	93	8229	87	7222	89	6346
Drugs	82	2452	78	1260	78	779	84	1622
Vandalism	81	1068	84	119	72	294	90	51
Burglary	74	659	87	279	81	122	86	34
Grand theft	69	220	33	2	68	23	50	1
Smoking	67	11713	71	10055	61	5846	66	6188
Auto theft	67	152	69	56	52	54	66	42
Truancy	63	8151	73	3819	65	851	80	1037
Petty theft	60	593	54	464	45	105	54	69
Armed robbery	52	124	100	2	58	11	—	—
Robbery	48	179	67	8	53	44	50	1
Shoplifting	45	1446	59	488	42	438	61	497
Runaway	38	32	33	384	44	13	11	4
Assault	25	213	36	386	23	31	6	2
Fights	23	309	21	32	14	58	21	14
Defy parents	23	2898	30	2373	16	648	42	2855

<sup>a</sup> Coefficient of concordance ( $w$ ) = .94 ( $p \leq .000$ ): Mean rank order correlation coefficient ( $\bar{R}$ ) = .88.

On the basis of the findings thus far, one would expect that any claim about the group nature of female delinquency based on official statistics would be grossly misleading. Just (as Erickson found) as official statistics overestimate the extent of group delinquency because of the nature of the offenses for which males are arrested, official figures underestimate the "groupness" of female delinquency.<sup>15</sup> Numerous studies using official statistics have shown an inordinate concentration of sexual offenses, runaway offenses and incorrigibility among female as compared to male offenders.<sup>16</sup> These offenses rank low in group violation rates. In contrast, self-report studies of delinquency suggest striking similarity in patterns of delinquency for the two sexes, the major differences appearing in rates rather than types of self-reported offenses.<sup>17</sup> To the degree that boys

tend to be arrested for offenses ranking high in group violation rates and girls tend to be arrested for offenses low in terms of group violations, official statistics will give a biased, "individualistic" image of female delinquency.

The group violation rates for males and females in urban and small-town settings are summarized in Table III and the rank order correlations for all pairs of subgroups are presented in Table IV. Again, one finds a great deal of concordance in the rank ordering of delinquent acts in terms of group violation rates. The rank order correlation coefficients range between .76 and .96, and the overall measure of concordance is .90 (statistically significant beyond the .001 level). There is a tendency, however, for the lowest rank order correlations to involve cross-sex comparisons. For example, all of the coefficients below .90 involved male-female comparisons. The largest rank order coefficients were obtained when comparing females in the two settings or males in the two settings.

As in the sample comparisons, there appears to be considerable stability in actual levels of group violation rates between sexes as well as between settings. The average difference between males and females is only 12% and only

<sup>15</sup> Erickson, *supra* note 5, at 120.

<sup>16</sup> Gibbons & Griswold, *Sex Differences Among Juvenile Court Referrals*, 42 SOC. & SOC. RESEARCH 106 (1957); Morris, *Female Delinquency and Relational Problems*, 43 SOC. FORCES 82 (1964).

<sup>17</sup> M. GOLD, *supra* note 7, at 64; Hindelang, *Age, Sex and the Versatility of Delinquency Involvements*, 18 SOC. PROB. 522, 533 (1971); Jensen & Eve, *Sex Differences in Delinquency*, in CRIMINOLOGY (forthcoming, 1976).

TABLE IV  
RANK ORDER CORRELATIONS (Rho's) BETWEEN  
GROUP VIOLATION RATES (GVR) FOR SUBGROUPS

	Urban Female	Small Town Male	Small Town Female
Urban Male	.76	.96	.91
Urban Female		.81	.94
Small Town Male			.88

four of thirty-five differences exceed 20%. However, there are consistent, statistically significant differences between males and females in *both* samples for shoplifting, grand theft, truancy, defiance and drinking. The only other significant difference occurs between urban males and urban females for marijuana use. As revealed in Table III, these differences are quite small.

A surprising finding is that females in both urban and rural settings tend to have group violation rates that are higher than their male counterparts. For urban settings, the female group violation rate exceeded the male rate for thirteen of eighteen offenses. For ten offenses (burglary, shoplifting, vandalism, smoking, truancy, auto theft, defiance, drinking, drunkenness, marijuana and drugs) the female group violation rates exceeded that for males in both settings. Moreover, of the statistically significant male-female differences, grand theft is the only offense where males exceeded females. Females had significantly higher group violation rates for shoplifting, truancy, defiance and drinking in both settings and significantly higher group violation rates for marijuana use in the urban setting. Thus, while females tend to commit fewer delinquent acts,<sup>18</sup> when such acts do occur females are just as likely as males to commit most offenses in the company of peers. Some offenses are significantly more likely to be group acts for females, while only one offense is less likely to be a group act for females as for males. One can thus conclude that the image of female delinquency as indi-

<sup>18</sup> Significant differences were found in the frequency of delinquent acts of most sorts in these data. Males significantly exceeded females for the most serious offenses with little difference for the less serious offenses. See M. Erickson & G. Jensen, Sex and Self-reported Delinquency (unpublished manuscript available from Maynard L. Erickson or Gary F. Jensen, Department of Sociology, U. of Ariz., Tucson, Ariz.).

vidualistic activities of loners is not supported by the data.

#### COMPARISON WITH OTHER GROUP PROPERTIES STUDIES

As noted earlier, considerably more official than unofficial (self-reported) data has been brought to bear on the group context of delinquent acts. In fact, from the vast self-reported literature there are still only two studies that are directly relevant to the group properties issue and a few that bear indirectly on the issue.<sup>19</sup> One of these studies utilized self-reported data gathered in Utah approximately ten years ago from a composite sample limited to white males, fifteen to seventeen years old, and was used in modeling the present investigation. An early analysis was based on fifty incarcerated youths, fifty probationers and fifty high school students.<sup>20</sup> Subsequent analyses were based on a larger composite sample (N = 336) representing these same three categories.<sup>21</sup> It was possible to compare group violation rates found in the present research with rates for twelve acts from the early analysis and with rates for ten acts drawing on subsequent analyses. Moreover, while not as directly comparable, comparisons can be made with a 1960 study

<sup>19</sup> Other research has dealt with this issue but using very different techniques. For example, Klein sets forth the proportion of incidents with companions reported, but draws his data from anecdotal information and probation records for "gang clusters" in Los Angeles. Such sources depend on what happened to be recorded and may underestimate group incidents for some acts and overestimate for others. Klein, *supra* note 7.

Exploring the social versus solitary nature of delinquent involvements of 337 male Catholic students in Berkeley, California, Hindelang utilizes self-reports but focuses on the type of *delinquents* (solitary, mixed and social) rather than the characteristics of acts. Hindelang, *The Social Versus Solitary Nature of Delinquent Involvements*, 2 BRIT. J. Soc. 167 (1971).

The interest here is in the group quality of *events, incidents or acts* which occur in a community rather than the characteristics of the "delinquents" involved. A small proportion of the offenders in the community may be "social" offenders and yet account for most of the incidents in the community. Group "delinquency" may be the major problem in a community irrespective of the proportion of delinquent youth who might fall in one or another category.

<sup>20</sup> Erickson, *supra* note 5.

<sup>21</sup> Erickson, *Group Violations and Official Delinquency: The Group Hazard Hypothesis*, 11 CRIMINOLOGY 127 (1973); Erickson, *supra* note 9.

TABLE V  
GROUP VIOLATION RATES (GVR) OF URBAN AND SMALL TOWN MALES FOR PREVIOUS STUDIES AND THE PRESENT STUDY

Comparable Acts	Utah Males (N = 150)		Utah Males (N = 336)		Arizona Small Town Males		Arizona Urban Males	
	GVR	Frequency	GVR	Frequency	GVR	Frequency	GVR	Frequency
Vandalism	91	4538	75	4881	72	294	81	1068
Burglary	84	690	67	1950	81	122	74	659
Drinking	78	11033	82	10105	86	8684	86	22032
Grand theft	78	184	64	457	68	23	69	220
Narcotics	77	22	—	—	78	779	82	2451
Petty theft <sup>a</sup>	72	14106	60	17560	45	105	60	593
Auto theft	72	638	61	1215	52	54	67	152
Armed robbery	69	16	—	—	58	11	52	124
Truancy	60	6754	55	11277	65	851	63	8151
Fights	55	7138	58	6145	14	58	23	309
Runaway	50	766	45	1036	44	13	38	32
Defy parents	17	7111	27	7069	16	648	23	2883

<sup>a</sup> For the Utah data two items were combined (theft less than \$2.00 and theft \$2.00 to \$50.00) to make petty theft comparable for the two studies.

by Gold based on male and female high school students in Flint, Michigan.<sup>22</sup>

Not only does there appear to be a good deal of stability among samples, settings and sex categories within the present study, but, as summarized in Table V, there is a great deal of concordance between the findings in the Utah research and the group violation rates found for small-town males and urban males. The rank order correlations (Rho's) for small-town and urban males in comparison to the Utah sample of 150 are .84 and .87, respectively. For the ten comparable acts using the larger Utah sample the rank order correlations were .93 for small-town males and .98 for urban males. The sample used in the earliest analysis included a greater proportion of "official delinquents" than the sample used in subsequent analyses. Thus, one would expect greater correspondence between the findings of the present study and the larger of the two earlier samples, since the present investigation did not purposely stratify by official delinquency.

Examining group violation rates act by act reveals considerable agreement between the two bodies of data. For example, the average difference between group violation rates using the larger Utah sample is only 10% and would

have been much lower if the extreme differences for "fighting" were excluded. This difference in group violation rates for fighting in the two studies probably resulted from differences in wording of questions used in collecting those data. In the Utah research, adolescents were asked to indicate how many times others were *watching or helping* during the fight, while the present study merely asked how many times someone was *helping*.

Finally, while the group violation rates are not presented, Gold does present the rank orders for the acts he studied.<sup>23</sup> Eleven acts were comparable enough to make some rank order comparisons possible. Comparing Gold's results with those for the four subsamples in the current investigation yields rank order correlations similar to those for Utah and Arizona. For urban males, the coefficient was +.87 and for urban females it was +.86. It was +.81 for the small-town males and +.78 for small-town females. It is interesting to note that the rank order correlations are stronger for the urban comparisons, since Gold's study was based on an urban sample. At any rate, the order of acts in terms of group violation rates is persistent in quite disparate samples and settings for different bodies of research covering a fifteen-year period.

<sup>22</sup> M. GOLD, *supra* note 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 85.

#### SOURCES OF ORDER IN PATTERNS OF AND LEVELS OF GROUP VIOLATION RATES

While the data thus far have suggested considerable stability both in rank orders and absolute levels of group violation rates, more analysis is needed to address fully the possible sources of order in group violation rates across time and space. One consideration—the institutional context of the act—was noted earlier when it was suggested that defiance of parents and running away from home are generated from conflict situations within the family and that other adolescents are not likely to be present at the moment of conflict. Another consideration might be the nature of the social learning process involved. Drug use of all kinds, but particularly marijuana use and drinking, have been depicted as primarily recreational activities unusually dependent on social reinforcement.<sup>24</sup> Acts such as theft and robbery result in acquisition of money or goods, while drug use results in highly subjective states, and whether commonly used illicit drugs are intrinsically rewarding independent of social reinforcement is problematic. Learning to recognize and define the effects of drugs may be far more contingent on peer-based learning than is the case for more instrumental offenses. Moreover, illegal drugs and, to a lesser extent, alcohol are not as pervasively distributed among the population as are property and goods. Access to property and goods is not as dependent on association with others as is access to illegal substances. Finally, it should be noted that some of the more serious property crimes, such as burglary, require more sophisticated knowledge and possibly more emotional support than do others. <sup>3</sup>

#### GROUP VIOLATION RATES AND OFFENSE SERIOUSNESS

Delinquent offenses differ considerably in seriousness, and the earlier research reported a rank order correlation of .58 between judge and probation officers' evaluations of seriousness and group violation rates. Using data reported in Erickson's 1971 paper, the rank order correlations between evaluations of seriousness and group violation rates in the present investigation were +.45 and +.44 for small-

town and urban males respectively. For the ten comparable offenses in the 1973 paper, the rank order correlations between the Provo evaluations and group violation rates were +.33 and +.35.

Another aspect of this research dealt with community evaluation of the seriousness<sup>25</sup> of offenses, allowing a further examination of the relation between seriousness and group violation rates. While there was a great deal of concordance between adults, juveniles, small-town and urban residents in the rank order of delinquent acts in terms of seriousness (rank order correlations for evaluations ranging from .91 and .97), there was virtually no correlation between seriousness and group violation rates. The rank order correlation was only +.12 for the sample as a whole.

There were certain offenses which were widely discrepant in ranking by group violation rates and seriousness. The most consistently out-of-order offenses were drinking, assault, smoking, truancy, marijuana use and armed robbery. Three of these offenses—drinking, armed robbery and truancy—were also badly out of order in comparison with the Utah studies.

Moreover, even within sets of similar acts, seriousness does not consistently order offenses in terms of group violation rates. For example, while smoking is characterized by lower group violation rates than drinking or marijuana use (see Table III), the latter two offenses are nearly identical in group violation rates even though marijuana use is consistently evaluated as more serious. For males, grand theft exceeds petty theft and shoplifting in group violation rate, but for females, grand theft has the lowest group violation rate.

<sup>25</sup> Offense seriousness was measured using magnitude estimate methods. Questions of the following form were administered to all juvenile subjects and random samples of adults and policemen in each community studied. Respondents were asked: "If the number 100 was used to indicate how serious stealing something worth less than \$100 is, what number would you give (description of the act)?" The median values of responses to the question for each type of act represents the seriousness of the act. The use of medians is now conventional in using magnitude estimation methods. Hamblin, *Social Attitudes: Magnitude Measurement and Theory*, in *MEASUREMENT IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES* (H. Blalock, Jr. ed. 1974); T. SELLIN & M. WOLFGANG, *THE MEASUREMENT OF DELINQUENCY* (1964).

<sup>24</sup> H. BECKER, *OUTSIDERS: STUDIES IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE* (1963); E. GOODE, *DRUGS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY* (1972).

If broad categories of offenses are considered, sizable discrepancies can be noted between evaluations of seriousness and group violation rates. Drug offenses tend to be evaluated low in seriousness but high in "groupness." Offenses such as auto theft and robbery rank high in terms of seriousness but fall towards the middle in terms of group violation rates. Status offenses such as running away from home and parental defiance rank low in both seriousness and groupness. In sum, seriousness as measured by public evaluation does not appear to be a major source of order in group properties in this investigation. There may, however, be other ways of defining seriousness (for example, actual legal responses) which would be in greater concordance with patterns of group violation rates.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS

A number of conclusions concerning delinquency as a group phenomenon appear justifiable by the data. One can conclude that delinquent acts generally occur in "the company of peers" and that such tendencies vary from offense to offense. Drug offenses tend to have the highest group violation rates while status offenses, other than drinking and smoking, have the lowest. Second, there is considerable concordance in the group properties of delinquent acts across time and space with high rank order correlations, and there are few significant sample differences within this study or, for that matter, between the results of the present investigation and data gathered over a decade ago in Utah and Michigan. Earlier findings were replicated over time and space. Third, one can seriously question the individualistic image of female delinquency, since what significant differences there are suggest that females may be proportionately more likely to commit offenses in a group context than males. Official data have tended to give an image of female delinquency biased towards status offenses and this bias may translate into an erroneous image of female delinquency. Finally, the variations in group violation rates are *not* attributable to seriousness as measured by adult and juvenile evaluations.

#### *Relevance for Present Theories*

Earlier in this article, it was suggested that labelling and deterrence theories, two of the

three major theoretical perspectives on deviance which hold center stage today, would both benefit greatly by an emphasis on the group nature of delinquent behavior. As a review of the literature and the data presently demonstrate, *delinquency is still group behavior!* Labelling theory would perhaps be given new vitality by a much stronger emphasis on peer group variables, including the premise that the majority of delinquent acts are committed in concert. Recognition of the latter might well be interpreted to suggest that full-blown "deviant identities" could and probably do develop in peer group settings *before* individuals are ever reacted to—a possibility seemingly denied by labelling theorists!<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, if, as a study by Erickson has suggested, violations in groups increase the probability of arrest and labelling, the relevance of group violation rates to labelling notions is clear.<sup>27</sup> In addition, an emphasis on "peer group" variables would perhaps save labelling from the purely individualistic perspective which many argue it now holds. Even if it is conceded that important processes begin with reaction, it seems crucial to recognize and emphasize that one's attachment to a delinquent (deviant) peer group may have profound impact on the potential effects of labelling for self-identity and career patterns. Even those labelling theorists who recognize peer phenomena as relevant give insufficient emphasis to peer variables.

Deterrence theory also suffers from inadequate attention to social context variables and is inordinately individualistic in orientation. The deterrence process is seemingly psychological. The inclusion of peer group variables would not only make the theory more sociological but might very well clear up some of the present confusion about the relative and highly unpredictable effects of variables like perceived certainty and severity.

Even the premise that most delinquent acts are group events is theoretically relevant to

<sup>26</sup> In fact, the tendency to ignore or dismiss primary deviance or prelabelled behavior is a major source of the criticism in most recent, radical critiques of labelling theory. See TAYLOR, WALTON & YOUNG, *THE NEW CRIMINOLOGY* 139 (1973); Young, *Working-class Criminology*, in *CRITICAL CRIMINOLOGY* 63 (I. Taylor, P. Walton and J. Young eds. 1975).

<sup>27</sup> Erickson, *Group Violations and Official Delinquency: The Group Hazard Hypothesis*, 11 *CRIMINOLOGY* 127 (1973).

deterrence theory. It suggests that in a group context, a host of important variables are probably operating to dilute the effects of individualistic variables, such as perceived certainty. Specifically, peer pressure in a given situation may make perceived certainty impotent as an explanatory variable. On the other hand, one might well find that in situations where an individual is alone, perceived certainty is the most important variable for explaining rates of behavior. The general point, of course, is that a whole new set of issues is raised for both labelling and deterrence theory when group violations and peer group phenomena are made central to those theories.

#### *Broader Implications*

The findings presented here have implications for issues even broader than the accurate depiction of delinquency as a group phenomenon and for labelling and deterrence theory. For example, in a recent work on "subcultural" theories of "urbanism," Claude Fisher reiterates the widely-accepted view that not only is urbanism correlated with high rates of "unconventionality," but also that this difference is particularly prominent for group or subcultural unconventionality.<sup>28</sup> He argues that "a small town may have a few delinquent youths, but only in a large city will there be sufficient numbers (*i.e.*, a critical mass) sufficiently distinctive to establish a viable delinquent subculture." He does note, however, that "little has been done to estimate systematically the effects of 'grouping' across various realms of action."<sup>29</sup>

Of course, even the assumption that urbanism is correlated with delinquent behavior, while widely accepted, has yet to be demonstrated. In fact, a recent study of rural Oregon youth as compared to a similar study in Philadelphia<sup>30</sup> leads Polk to conclude that "non-metropolitan youths have just about as many run-ins with the law as metropolitan youths, and the causes of these confrontations are often of roughly equal seriousness in both towns and cities."<sup>31</sup> While the present study concentrates

on group violation rates of delinquent acts rather than volume, it can also be reported that there were few statistically significant differences between urban and small-town males in rates of self-reported delinquency. When there were differences, the mining town tended to be characterized by the greatest involvement. The urban community and the tourist town fell in the middle, with the farm town having the lowest rates.

The county encompassing the three small-town communities actually had a juvenile court referral rate greater than the two standard metropolitan statistical areas in the state. If rural Oregon and Philadelphia youth are comparably delinquent, and Arizona youth from small towns of between 1200 and 8000 population do not differ significantly from those in a city of 350,000, then it is time seriously to question common images of rural-urban differences in delinquency.

The present analysis suggests that at least as a peer group phenomenon, there is little difference between small-town delinquency and urban delinquency. However, the notion of a "delinquent subculture" is sufficiently vague that these findings might be dismissed as peripheral to the argument. On the other hand, other researchers attempting to assess delinquent values report that the attitudes towards law-breaking of the rural adolescents they studied were similar to attitudes found among adolescents in "hard-core" delinquency areas of large cities and, in fact, were not significantly different from those of older, institutionalized delinquents.<sup>32</sup> Even research on adults has suggested an homogenization of attitudes between rural and urban populations.<sup>33</sup> Such findings tend to be ignored or dismissed by those dedicated to the preservation of rurality as a major variable in explaining deviance.

At the present time, there is no adequate justification for arguing that the group properties of delinquent acts (or the distribution of

<sup>28</sup> Fischer, *Toward a Subcultural Theory of Urbanism*, 80 *Am. J. Soc.* 1319, 1328-30 (1975).

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 1328.

<sup>30</sup> M. WOLFGANG, B. FIGLIO & T. SELLIN, *DELINQUENCY IN A BIRTH COHORT* (1972).

<sup>31</sup> K. Polk, *Teenage Delinquency in Small Town America* (1974) (Research Report 5, Center for Stud-

ies of Crime and Delinquency, National Institute of Mental Health).

<sup>32</sup> Ball & Lilly, *Juvenile Delinquency in a Rurban County*, 9 *J. RESEARCH CRIME & DELINQUENCY* 69 (1971).

<sup>33</sup> van Es & Brown, *The Rural-Urban Variable Once More: Some Individual Level Observations*, 39 *RURAL Soc.* 373 (1974).

delinquent acts or values) vary between small towns and large metropolitan areas. If "delinquent subcultures" are ultimately defined in such a way that evidence gathered thus far can be dismissed, or if the relevant comparisons end up being between "megalopolis" and "farmers," then the theory would explain very little. If, however, such variables are to retain their status as general explanatory variables in

the study of deviance, there must be some effort to explain the lack of theoretically predicted differences. This analysis leads one to question traditional images of male-female delinquency and suggests that it is time to move beyond academic *a priori* dedication to a thorough empirical analysis of urban-rural differences in delinquency as individual and group behavior.