DIFFERENTIAL OPPRESSION THEORY AND FEMALE DELINQUENCY

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ABSTRACT

The study of juvenile delinquency has focused almost exclusively on males. There are two reasons why: (1) more boys commit serious delinquency and boys commit more delinquency than girls and (2) men dominate the field of criminology. This paper takes a step toward opening a conversation about female delinquency by discussing it in terms of Regoli and Hewitt's *theory of differential oppression*. According to Regoli and Hewitt, girls in patriarchal society are *doubly oppressed*: they are oppressed as children and are oppressed as females. These "modes of oppression" account for both the lower rates of female delinquency as well as the particular adaptive reactions of girls to oppression, which include delinquency.

For over a century, the study of delinquency has focused almost exclusively on the behavior of males. In part, this reflects the simple reality that male law violating exceeds that of females in both frequency and seriousness. According to the most recent *Uniform Crime Reports*, boys were arrested for 82 percent of violent crimes (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2002). But this focus also reflects the nature of the study of criminology, which has been dominated by men who see the world through their own eyes (Daly & Chesney-Lind 1988). According to a report by the American Sociological Association, the overwhelmingly majority of professors who research and teach juvenile delinquency are males (American Sociological Association 2002). In addition, the vast majority of people who create laws, who prosecute and defend offenders, and who administer the juvenile corrections systems have been, and still are, men.

The United States has traditionally been a patriarchal society, one where the social, legal, and political climate values male dominance and hierarchy. Patriarchy not only affects social structures (including the family and the economy), relationships, and definitions of appropriate social roles, but also how people, both males and females, perceive the world around them. Gender stratification as a product of patriarchy has led to unconscious assumptions about female and male behavior and misbehavior (Belknap 2001). To the extent that patriarchy extends to the academic arena of criminological research and writing, the delinquent behaviors of girls and the causes of those behaviors have largely been invisible. While sex is the most statistically significant factor in predicting delinquency, criminologists have rarely shown much concern in including girls in their samples. When females have been studied as delinquents, it has nearly al-

ways been in comparison to males: why girls are less delinquent than boys, why girls commit less serious crimes, and how the causes of female delinquency differ from those of male delinquency.

In this paper we briefly examine how patriarchy and gender stratification affect the lives of young girls and the development of girls' gender roles and identity formation and then provide an explanation for the patterns of delinquent behavior of girls as responses to their double oppression as female and child.

GROWING UP FEMALE IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

The United States has traditionally been a patriarchal society. Patriarchy affects social structures, relationships, and definitions of appropriate social roles, but also how people, both males and females, perceive the world around them. Gender stratification as a product of patriarchy has led to unconscious assumptions about female and male behavior and misbehavior. For example, in Charlotte Brontë's 19th century novel *Jane Eyre*, the young protagonist paces the roof of Thornfield Hall, frustrated over the contrast between her confined existence and the possibilities that lie in the larger world:

> Women need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (Brontë 1971 96)

The frustration that came from realizing the

unfair situation she and other women faced in life because of their sex was not unique to Jane Eyre. In generation after generation, young girls have experienced the same frustration after realizing the same unfairness. Somehow, their place in society has been defined as being different from that of boys. But Jane Eyre's sense of a self-identity as a female was perhaps more consciously formed than that of many other young girls, and such awareness may, in part, explain why some girls feel more frustration than others over their defined place in society.

Throughout most of human history, girls have grown up in societies that have viewed them as being "inferior" to boys. The relegation of girls to more restricted lives also reflects patriarchal society, in which males have managed to maintain control over females. For both boys and girls, one's sense of self, and of oneself in relation to others, is highly influenced by society's perceptions of gender roles. In patriarchal societies, then, growing up female is quite different from growing up male and has significant implications for how girls confront their lives.

One implication may be observed in the delinquent adaptations of girls. For example Chesney-Lind (2001) suggests that female delinquency is accounted for by the gender and sexual scripts in patriarchal families that lead girls, more than boys, to be victims of family-related sexual abuse. In patriarchal societies, male-female relationships are unequal, and young women are defined as sexual objects and seen as sexually attractive by older men. Girls become more vulnerable to both physical and sexual abuse because of norms that give males control over females and keep them at home where victimizers have greater access to them. Furthermore, victimizers, usually males, can call upon official agencies of control to keep girls at home. The juvenile court in the United States has historically been willing to uncritically support parental control and authority over daughters. Girls who react to abuse by running away from home are often returned to their parents by juvenile authorities. If girls persist in running away, the court may then incarcerate them. Girls who successfully run away often find themselves unable to enroll in school or to obtain reasonable jobs and may then be forced into the streets, where their survival may depend on petty crimes, such as theft, panhandling, or prostitution.

Next we will explain how girls' gender roles

and their identities that are formed in reaction to them are developed in patriarchal societies.

DEVELOPMENT OF GIRLS' GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Today, with new technology such as fetal monitoring systems, creating gender-role identities may begin in the womb. Almost immediately, upon learning the sex of their child, parents begin describing them using typical gender stereotypes. In one study parents described baby boys as being firm, large-featured, alert, and strong, while girl babies were characterized as delicate, fine-featured, soft, and small (Rubin, Orovenzano, & Luria 1974). Parents also respond to toddlers differently on the basis of a child's sex. They discourage rough-and-tumble play by girls and doll play by boys. They listen to girls and respond to them more attentively when girls are gentle or talk softly, but they attend more to boys when boys demonstrate assertiveness (Richmond-Abbot 1992). By age four or five, children have become aware of their gender and the behaviors appropriate for it (Fagot 1984; Lott 1987).

What are the effects of gender-role socialization patterns on girls' identities and self-esteem? The patterns of socialization lead many girls to identify with traditional female roles, anticipate economic dependence and a more restricted adult status, and accept political, social, and sexual privileges secondary to those of boys. Such socialization creates narrower boundaries of opportunities for girls than boys and instills in them a self-perception of powerlessness and dependence (LaGrange & Silverman 1999). Girls also learn "that to be feminine includes the prescription to be nurturing," (Richmond-Abbot 1992) and therefore they focus on relationships. But this emphasis on relationships encourages in adolescent girls the development of a "morality of response," or "care," which emphasizes the creation and maintenance of interdependence and responsiveness in relationships (Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer 1990).

Girls, then, begin to operate very early with a network of intimate interpersonal ties that reinforce a more nurturing and caring role. And because girls are more likely to define themselves relationally, they do not develop the same precise and rigid ego boundaries that are common to boys (Chodorow 1978). For instance, in a 3-year study of 100 girls, ages 15 and 16, Sue Lees explored some of the problems of identity for adolescent girls. She found that a

girl's sexuality is central to the way she is judged in everyday life (Lees 1989). While a boy's social standing is typically enhanced by his sexual exploits, a girl's standing can be destroyed by simple insinuations; therefore she is often required to defend her sexual reputation to *both* boys and girls. The use of slang terms and insults, such as *slut* or *ho*, functions to control the activities and social reputations of girls. A girl need not actually have slept with a boy to have her reputation threatened. As one girl commented:

> When there're boys talking and you've been out with more than two you're known as the 'crisp' they're passing around.... The boy's alright but the girl's a bit of scum. (Lees 1989 24)

The possibility of being labeled "bad" or a "slut" is a form of "moral censure" reflecting dominant perceptions of departure, or potential departure, from male conceptions of female sexuality. More importantly, such terms are applied to "any form of social behavior by girls that would define them as autonomous from the attachment to and domination by boys" (Lees 1989 25). Consequently, girls are steered into acceptable or "legitimate" forms of sexual and social behavior characterized by having a steady boyfriend, being in love, and, eventually, getting married. In many ways, a girl's apparent sexual behavior is seen as a barometer, testing her capacity to learn appropriate cues of social conduct with boys (Hudson 1989 207).

Mark Totten (2000) argues that the quick willingness of adolescent boys to use demeaning labels to control girls is often accompanied by physical coercion. He quotes a 15-year-old boy as saying:

> We all think that girls should do what we want them to. And it pisses us off when they don't. So I've seen some of them when they've hit girls. And all the time we are just joking around, calling them names—slut, cunt, whore, bitch, fat cow—we all do it.

To what extent are delinquent acts among girls acts of rebellion against the constraints of these restricting and oppressive sex roles imposed in adolescence? Does their oppression as children and as girls account for their maladaptive behaviors? In the final two sections of this paper we will examine the theory of differ-

ential oppression and how it might explain female delinquency.

DIFFERENTIAL OPPRESSION THEORY

According to Regoli and Hewitt, *all* children are oppressed (2001, 2003). The amount of oppression children experience falls on a continuum, ranging from simple demands for obedience to rules designed for the convenience of adults to the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children. They contend that children's problem behaviors including crime and delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental disorders can be understood as adaptive reactions to oppressive social situations that are created by adults.

Because of their social and legal status, children have little power to affect their social world. Compared to adults, children have almost no choice regarding whom they associate with and limited resources available to influence others or to support themselves independently of adults. Therefore, they have the least access to resources that could allow them to negotiate changes in their environment (Finkelhor 1997). From a resource standpoint, adults, having superior power in relationship to children, are at a considerable advantage in determining and enforcing rules that control the basic lives of children. Compared to parents, teachers, and other adult authority figures, children are relatively powerless and expected to — often required to — submit to the power and authority of these adults. When this power is exercised to prevent children from attaining access to valued material and psychological resources, to deny children participation and self-determination, and to impede children from developing a sense of competence and self-efficacy, it becomes oppression.

One consequence of oppression and control is that people are transformed into *objects*, which are acted upon by those in power, as opposed to *subjects*, who act upon and transform their world. Paulo Friere (1990 51) has noted that the greater the exercise of control by oppressors over the oppressed, the more they change them into apparently inanimate things or objects, rather than subjects. One group objectifying another allows the dominant group to control the dialogue about the relationship between the two groups, to establish the rules governing the relationship, and even to create the rules for changing the rules. In this context, the person is not treated as an end for him or herself but as a means for the ends of others,

with the more powerful group exploiting the less powerful for its own gain. Oppression thus restrains, restricts, and prevents people from experiencing the essential attributes of human life—such as sentience, mobility, awareness, growth, autonomy, and will.

The images adults commonly use to describe children offer support to the premise that adults oppress children. Friere describes how oppressors often create images of oppressed groups as dependent and threatening to the social order:

> For the oppressors it is always the oppressed (whom they obviously never call "the oppressed" but—depending on whether they are fellow countrymen or not—"those people" or the "blind and envious masses" or "savages" or "natives" or "subversives") who are disaffected, who are "violent," "barbaric," "wicked," or "ferocious" when they react to the violence of the oppressors. (1990 41)

It is quite easy to substitute the following images of children as the oppressed into the preceding quote: "teenage hoodlums," "problem children," "super-predators," or "delinquents" who are "disrespectful," "barbaric," "violent" or simply "alienated" when they react to their oppressors. Because the identity a person takes on is profoundly shaped by the way others identify and react to her or him (Cooley 1902; Becker 1963), these images and labels are likely to have detrimental consequences for children. According to labeling theory, an individual's ensuing problem behavior is significantly affected by the labeling experience. Therefore, simply viewing children through these lenses may both create and reinforce these behaviors. Indeed, children often fully accept the socially constructed notion that they are inferior, incompetent, and irresponsible. In addition, adults' perceptions of children as inferior, subordinate, and troublemakers allow adults to rationalize their oppressive acts. However, the theory of differential oppression asserts that the oppression children experience is much more than a simple label of deviance or delinquency; rather it is the cumulative result of a lifetime of oppression *beginning at conception*.

Certainly the relationship between adults and children is not always oppressive. Adults can, and many do much of time, treat children as subjects by providing environments full of warm affectionate contact, freedom, respect, an absence of threats, and teaching by example rather than by preaching. Unfortunately, given the high rates of substance abuse, violence, teenage pregnancy, and suicide children experience, it is likely that many children grow up under oppressive conditions that fail to support their developmental needs (Hamburg 1974). The theory of differential oppression contends that the problem behaviors children experience are a consequence of the way they are treated by the adults in their lives. It is organized around the following four principles:

1. Because children lack power due to their age, size, and lack of resources they are easy targets for adult oppression.
2. Adult oppression of children occurs in multiple social contexts and falls on a continuum ranging from benign neglect to malignant abuse.
3. Oppression leads to adaptive reactions by children. The oppression of children produces at least four adaptations: passive acceptance; exercise of illegitimate coercive power; manipulation of one's peers; and retaliation.
4. Children's adaptations to oppression create and reinforce adults' view of children as inferior, subordinate beings and as troublemakers. This view enables adults to justify their role as oppressor and further reinforces children's powerlessness.

It is likely that the psychological, emotional, or physical consequences that a child suffers depend on the duration, frequency, intensity, and priority of the oppression, and on the child's stage of development (Sutherland 1947). The term oppression is actually a summation of the abusive, neglectful, and disrespectful relations children confront day after day (Miller 1984). The oppression of children is structured into the rhythms of everyday life. Oppression of children by adults occurs in multiple social contexts and falls on a continuum ranging from benign neglect to malignant abuse. Oppression occurs whenever adults act in ways that fail to respect, belittle, or trivialize children as being something less than authentic and feeling human beings. Children are exposed to different levels and types of oppression that vary depending on their age, level of development, and beliefs and perceptions of their parents. While there are occasions when adults exercise power over children out of sincere concern for the child's welfare, often the adult's use of power over children is about the needs

and interests of the adult, rather than the child. In fact, much of the oppression children suffer stems from their parent's inability to meet their needs. There are many reasons why adults are not able to meet the needs of children. Some adults may be uninformed about what the needs of children are at various stages of development, while others may know what children need, but are not capable of responding to those needs. Oppressive structural forces, such as poverty, social isolation, and residing in a disadvantaged neighborhood are likely to negatively influence parenting practices. However, the underlying source of adult oppression also may be found in the mistreatment they received as children (Miller 1984) and continue to experience as adults (Colvin 2000). Therefore, the oppression adults inflict onto children is likely a part of a *chain of coercion and abuse* that is transmitted from one generation to another.

Certain parenting styles are more likely than others to oppress children. Some parents oppress children as they attempt to impose and maintain adult conceptions of social order. Such parents may view their children as extensions of themselves, rather than as individuals (Taylor 1980), and therefore, feel free to impose their will on their children. In any case, the children are required to obey rules designed to reinforce adult notions of "right and wrong" behavior. In an attempt to exert greater control over their children, parents and other adults often use coercion or force. According to Gelles and Straus (1985), the American cultural norms regarding violence in families prescribe that it is acceptable to hit a child if they are doing something wrong and "won't listen to reason." Regardless of whether the act is called a smack, beating, or a spanking, it is *always* degrading to the child who is unable to defend her- or himself (Miller 1984). At minimum these actions are oppressive because they prohibit children from authoring their own lives, at maximum they may become excessive, lead to physical harm and long-term psychological damage, and are a mechanism for transmitting an ageist ideology that diminishes the value of children in relation to adults across society.

Other parents oppress children through neglectful parenting that fails to meet their children's physical, emotional, and educational needs. Examples of physical neglect include the refusal of or delay in seeking health care, abandonment, expulsion from the home or re-

fusal to allow a runaway to return home, and inadequate supervision. Emotional neglect includes such actions as inattention to the child's needs for affection, refusal of or failure to provide needed psychological care, spouse abuse in the child's presence, and permission of drug or alcohol use by the child. The allowance of chronic truancy, failure to enroll a child of mandatory school age in school, and failure to attend to a special educational need are all examples of educational neglect. Generally neglect occurs anytime a caretaker permits the child to experience suffering or fails to provide one of the basic ingredients essential for developing into a physically, intellectually, emotionally and psychologically healthy person. A study conducted in 1993 found that almost two million children were endangered by neglect in the United States (Sedlak & Broadhurst 1996). Single incidents of neglect may have no harmful effects or, in some cases, they can result in death. Chronic patterns of neglect may result in severe developmental delays or severe emotional disabilities. According to Munkel (1996 115), "Neglected children suffer hurts in their bodies, their minds, their emotions, and their spirits."

Criminologist Mark Colvin (2000) explains that adults expose children to varying levels of coercive controls in order to gain their compliance. Coercive controls may involve physical punishments or the withdrawal of love and support. They are most typically applied to parental disciplining patterns, but also apply to any authority-subordinate relationship. Since children by virtue of their status as children are always subordinate to adults, some combination of these interaction patterns is likely to characterize all adult-child relationships. Colvin explains that the controls vary along two dimensions—their degree of coercion and their consistency in application. The controls can be either coercive or non-coercive and they can be applied in a way that is either consistent or erratic, producing four types of control experiences. The first type, consistent and non-coercive, can be described as "fair but firm" and involves rewards and positive feedback for prosocial behavior (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). This style of parenting is associated with the best developmental outcomes for children. The second type, erratic and non-coercive controls, describes a lax, overly permissive manner of relating and seems to correlate with the neglectful parenting style described in the preceding paragraph. The third

type of control experience is described as consistent and coercive. Coercive controls are imparted on a consistent schedule, creating a highly punitive relationship between the controller and the subordinate. The fourth type, erratic and coercive, provides a highly punitive reaction to misconduct that is highly inconsistent. Often these punishments are harsh, but not aimed at correcting behavior and may include yelling, teasing, humiliation, and threats of physical violence. Patterson (1995) argues that inconsistent but frequent punitive forms of discipline in families create a coercive pattern of relating that is reflected in all family interactions. Each of these control experiences varies in the amount of oppression they inflict upon the child, which lead to different social psychological and behavioral outcomes.

ADAPTATIONS TO OPPRESSION AND FEMALE DELINQUENCY

Differential oppression theory provides a new, exciting, and promising framework for understanding why girls become delinquent as well as why girls commit fewer and generally less serious delinquencies than boys. Significant gender differences in amount, frequency, and seriousness of delinquencies as reported by nearly all official and unofficial statistics clearly establishes the fact that delinquency is predominately a male phenomenon. Boys are arrested more than girls, particularly for violent crimes. Boys accounted for 71 percent of all juvenile arrests in 2001. Over 82 percent of juveniles arrested for Index violent crimes were boys, and boys accounted for approximately 90 percent of the arrests for murder, robbery, burglary, and arson (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2002). There are only two offense categories for which girls are arrested more frequently than boys: prostitution (70%) and running away (59%). Girls comprise between 30 and 39 percent of all juvenile arrests in five offense categories: larceny/theft (39%), other assaults (32%), liquor law violations (32%), curfew violations (32%), and disorderly conduct (30%).

Differential oppression theory argues that adults oppress children as they attempt to impose and maintain adult conceptions of social order. Generally, the more oppressed the child is, the more likely she or he will become delinquent or commit other problem behaviors as an adaptation to their oppression. These adaptive reactions are the same general modes of reaction to oppression that all children may

express. Each of these adaptations involves a degree of conscious resistance or "fighting back" by children (Rogers & Buffalo 1974) as they attempt to negotiate and self-maintain their status. Adolescent adaptations to oppression minimally include passive acceptance, exercise of illegitimate coercive power, manipulation of one's peers, and retaliation.

However, it is important to note that girls in patriarchal societies are *doubly oppressed.* While some scholars have attributed the double oppression or double marginality of females to their status as both female and their status as minority, Third World, non-bourgeoisie, disabled, or lesbian, (Bunch 1972; Lindley 1979; Messerschmidt 1986; Priestley 1998), we argue that the most critical multiple oppression of adolescent females is their oppression as girl and as child. Adult conceptions of the *girl as child* (inferior, subordinate, troublemaker) lead to oppressive acts by adults that alienate the girl and lead her into adaptive reactions as she attempts to become a "subject" instead of an "object."

If oppression leads to maladaptive and delinquent behaviors, and if girls are doubly oppressed, why are they not twice as delinquent as boys? The statistics noted above clearly demonstrate that females are less delinquent than boys and that their delinquencies are less serious. We believe this is actually produced by their double oppression. Girls, as children, are oppressed in their designated inferior age status to adults as are boys and develop understandable resentments, anger, and desire to respond in some new way to their condition. Like boys, girls frequently engage in status or social order offenses (liquor law, curfew, running away, and disorderly conduct) and property offenses (primarily larceny/theft). Over one-third of all arrests of girls are for the two offenses of larceny/theft and running away.

But girls, unlike boys, are oppressed because of their gender. Traditional patterns of gender socialization, as suggested earlier in this paper, have led to gender oppression. Girls have traditionally been encouraged to be relational rather than competitive, to be nurturing rather than manipulative, and to be passive rather than aggressive. According to JoAnne Gora (1982 109),

> girls who are raised to be nurturant, maternal, warm, and sympathetic have a difficult time being violent toward those they believe to be stronger than themselves.

Girls, more so than boys, have traditionally been more closely supervised by parents or other adults and have been more restricted in out-of-home activities. Being socialized into traditional female roles and being more closely supervised and regulated in daily behavior ultimately suppresses girls' feelings of responding to their oppression by openly delinquent acts. The gender socialization of boys on the other hand, reinforcing of competitiveness, aggressiveness, and manipulation, facilitates, if not encourages, openly delinquent acts in response to their oppression as children.

In the following discussion, we examine how children generally, and girls specifically, adapt to their oppressive experiences. These modes of adaptation include passive acceptance, the exercise of illegitimate coercive power, manipulation of one's peers, and retaliation.

Passive Acceptance

As most people adapt via conformity to strain produced by a disjuncture between culturally defined goals emphasizing success and institutionalized means available to achieve that success (Merton 1957), most girls adapt to oppression through *passive acceptance* of their subordinate and inferior status. This acceptance, or conformity, produces subsequent obedience to their oppressors—an obedience built upon fear, which derives from implied threats and intimidation. Due to the higher status generally afforded to males and the low levels of female involvement in delinquency, conformity seems to be a more common adaptation among females (Steffensmeier 1993, 1996; Belknap 2001; Hannon & Dufour 1998). Since young girls are inundated by adult domination, they quickly learn that obedience is expected. Such adaptations are similar to the passive acceptance of the slave role, adaptations of prison inmates, and immersion in the cycle of violence for battered women.

However, such acquiescence or passive acceptance may be only a facade, presenting to the oppressor the appearance of conformity (Rogers & Buffalo 1974). Girls outwardly appear to accept their inferior positions, but develop a repressed hatred for their oppressors, adapting to the structures of domination in which they are immersed. Once a situation of violence and oppression has been established, it engenders an entire way of life and behavior for those caught up in it—oppressors and oppressed alike. Both are submerged in this situation and both bear marks of oppression. The oppressed are likely to believe they have no purpose in life except those the oppressor prescribes for them.

Exercise of Illegitimate Coercive Power

A second adaptation is the *exercise of illegitimate coercive power*. Many girls are attracted to delinquency because it helps them to establish a sense of autonomy and control. This anticipatory delinquency is a yearning for adult status (see Matza 1964; Katz 1988). Delinquent acts can immediately and demonstratively make things happen and provide the child with a sense of restored potency denied him or her by adults and parents. Sexual misbehavior, illicit use of drugs or alcohol, and violations of the criminal law derive greater symbolic importance for the girl to the extent they demonstrate resistance to adult attempts to exert control over her behavior.

The "sneaky thrill" that accompanies shoplifting, drug use, or illicit sexual encounters, for example, is not simply a product of the rush of the act, but a consequence of knowing that "you" are controlling the event. That is, "you" selected the time, the place, and the act. It was not accidental, nor was it done as a result of others' expectations. "You" controlled the vertical and the horizontal of the delinquent act. Eating disorders, especially among female adolescents, are another way of demonstrating a sense of autonomy and control. When a young girl perceives that she has little or no control over her own life, that her parents determine all important activities and goals, she may then choose to exert absolute control over what food is taken into or kept in her body (until she is force-fed).

Manipulation of One's Peers

A third adaptation is the *manipulation of one's peers*. This is an attempt by a girl to become empowered. Through manipulation of others within the peer group, a girl who has experienced oppression at the hands of adults may acquire a sense of strength and control or a degree of empowerment not otherwise felt. Gerald Marwell (1966 41) suggests that

> at any given point of time this potential [for social power] lies primarily in the opinions of the actor held by those with whom one interacts. If one is thought strong, one, by and large, is strong, or at least, may use "strength" to manipulate others.

Bullying younger or smaller children at school may be a form of displacement of a girl's anger at a parent or teacher. According to recent estimates, nearly 2 million children are bullied at least once a week (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt 2001). Girls also verbally bully or manipulate peers, especially female peers, in an attempt to establish social hierarchies, eliminate competition for attention, release tensions without violence, or define group membership and friendships (Fleisher 1998). Unfortunately, the mere involvement of a girl with her peers leads many adults to view the involvement as problematic in itself. Adults may then react by exercising even greater control over the child's interaction with others.

Retaliation

The fourth adaptation is *retaliation*, which may include delinquent acts ranging from property crimes to violent offenses. It is the least common of the adaptations to oppression, and it is often also the most serious. Girls may engage in retaliation or "getting back" at the people or the institutions they believe are the source of their oppression. Some adolescent girls who are severely physically or sexually abused by parents may retaliate by striking directly at their parents, assaulting or killing them (Post 1982; Mones 1985; Paulson, Coombs & Landsverk 1990; Flowers 2002). And as Dawson and Langan (1994 4) point out, when a daughter kills a parent, it is much more likely to be a father (81%) than a mother (19%), possibly reflecting greater physical or sexual abuse of a daughter by a father. Parents who are excessively demanding or verbally or physically abusive are instrumental in producing a retaliatory or assertively defensive aggressive response by the child. Reprisals by children may even produce an effective challenge against abusive parents. As Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz (1980 121) note:

> [P]arents of older children often say they don't hit them any more because "they're too big now." This is often said in the sense of retaliation being dangerous, rather than because they think it is wrong to hit children of that age.

Not only larger, stronger girls strike back at an abusive parent. Some smaller, physically weaker children may fight back by compensating with speed and choice of weapon. For ex-

ample, a young girl may wait until her parents are asleep and then torch the home. Or, she may retaliate by striking at a substitute, such as a younger sibling who is viewed as a representative of her parents.

Timothy Brezina (1999) analyzed data from the Youth in Transition survey obtained from interviews and questionnaires administered to more than 2,200 10th graders in 87 schools. Brezina (1999 426) found that although 72 percent of the respondents indicated that their parents never or only rarely slap them, "a substantial number of respondents report frequent or even constant slapping by their parents." While most students reported they had never hit either of their parents, 11 percent said they had hit at least one of their parents one or more times in the previous three years. Brezina found that parents who slap their children generate aggressive responses from their children, and that the retaliatory use of aggression by children tended to reduce subsequent slapping by parents.

Finally, many girls retaliate against their parents by turning inward—by becoming chronically depressed and contemplating or committing suicide (Chandy, Blum & Resnick 1996; Plass 1993). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Grunbaum, Kann, Kinchen, Williams, Ross, Lowry & Kolbe 2001), nearly 24 percent of female students surveyed had seriously considered attempting suicide at some time during the 12 months preceding the survey, 18 percent had made a specific plan to attempt suicide, 11 percent had actually attempted suicide, and 2.6 percent made a suicide attempt resulting in an injury, poisoning, or overdose requiring medical attention. During the early 1990s, nearly 2,200 children between the ages of 10 and 19 committed successful suicides annually in the United States. While the specific motives for most adolescent suicides are unknown, anecdotal data suggests retaliation against a parent or other significant adult is not uncommon.

CONCLUSIONS

Adult conceptions in patriarchal societies of the *girl as female* (relational, nurturing, and passive) lead to oppression reinforcing her traditional gender role and, subsequently, to the girl's identity as "object." Treated as an "object," a girl may adapt by developing an identity through relationships with boys; she does not have to "prove" her own worth as long as she is "related" to a proven person. Consequently,

her delinquencies may be indirect and relational. Being defined as a female "object" may also reinforce the identity of the girl as a "sexual object." In this case, adaptations may take the form of sexual delinquencies and prostitution.

But oppression of girls as females also carries with it a reinforcement of more domestic, passive, relational, and nurturing roles that often exclude them from the outside world of male street-peer groups. Girls are not only more closely monitored and kept closer to home; they are encouraged to identify with their mothers and to concentrate on building and maintaining relations. In addition, girls learn to anticipate economic dependence and the need to develop intimate interpersonal ties through which a sense of value and self-esteem may be gained. At the same time, they are discouraged from pursuing independent acts and risk-taking activities. As girls develop identities that reinforce positive, prosocial, and nurturing relations with others stressing caring and fairness, they are less likely to engage in behaviors harmful to others.

Differential oppression theory, as applied to female delinquency, builds on earlier work stressing differences in socialization patterns of girls and boys and views the roles of socialization of adolescent girls within the context of oppression (Kingston, Regoli, & Hewitt 2003). While male adolescents experience the oppression of being a child, female adolescents experience the double oppression of being a female child. The socialization of girls not only leads to their being less likely to engage in delinquency in general, but also to their likelihood of engaging in particular forms of delinquency.

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