Gendered Experiences in Developmental Pathways to Crime, Extended: Editorial Introduction

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In 2016, we placed a call for expressions of interest on the topic of gendered experiences in developmental pathways to crime. The response was overwhelming so much so that two issues of the JDLCC were needed to showcase the published papers.

In September 2016, we published our first special issue on “gendered experiences in developmental pathways to crime”. The collection of papers was excellent and the response from the readership of the JDLCC has been positive. In this second special issue, we provide another collection of papers that focus on the gendered nature of the development of offending over the life-course. We have been heartened by the interest in this topic shown by many scholars across the world. It is not that long ago that examining the gender-crime relationship and female patterns and pathways to offending would be viewed as marginal to the main interests of criminologists and scholars focused on developmental patterns of offending across the life-course. The comprehensive collection of papers in these two special issues illustrate the maturation of this area of scholarship. While we are not suggesting the ship has landed per se, but rather that great progress has been illustrated by the response to the call for papers as well as the high quality of papers appearing in each of the editions. Collectively, the published papers illustrate the importance and sophistication of this area of research endeavour.

Overview

In the first paper, “The Glueck Women: Using the Past to Assess and Extend Contemporary Understandings of Women’s Desistance from Crime”, Lisa Broidy

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and Elizabeth Cauffman provide an analysis of the Women's Reformatory Study. These data were originally collected by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck and while acknowledging that external change mechanisms vary across different socio-historical contexts, Broidy and Cauffman demonstrate the ways in which gendered social norms affect the availability of opportunities for desistance. In the Glueck data, they identify that desistance can be explained by having a prosocial husband, having children, and work/being a homemaker. They explored these patterns in more detail by conducting a conjunctive analysis of case configuration. This demonstrated that those who had desisted had accessed three or more of the external change mechanisms while those who persisted were not likely to have accessed any of them.

The gendered nature of opportunities for criminal offending is also explored in the second paper, "Gendered Opportunities and Risk Preferences for Offending across the Life-Course", but with a shift in focus from desistance, to opportunities for offending. In this paper, Jennifer Schwartz and Darrell Steffensmeier aim to generate a gendered paradigm of female offending and the gender gap. To do this, they review a range of both qualitative and quantitative research to demonstrate that opportunities for offending as well as an individual's willingness to engage in offending are gendered. Specifically, they identify that access to crime opportunities is gendered and that this interacts with gendered focal concerns and risk behaviours. They argue that these interactions can explain gender differences in offending.

The third paper is titled "The Reciprocal Relationship Between Gang Involvement and Peer Victimization: Findings from the Pittsburgh Girls Study". In their examination of the 2450 girls' self reports from ages 11–15, Amanda Gilman, James Howell, Alison Hipwell, and Stephanie Stepp found that 6.9% have reported gang involvement. Their cross-lagged models demonstrate that for girls, the relationship between peer victimization and gang involvement during adolescence is reciprocal over time.

In the fourth paper, "For Males Only? The Search for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Female Juvenile Offenders", Kevin Wolff, Michael Baglivio, Michael Vaughn, Matt DeLisi, and Alex Piquero examined 3008 females from juvenile justice residential commitment programs. They found that an earlier onset of offending, gang involvement, child welfare involvement, conduct disorder and temperament problems differentiated serious, violent, and chronic offenders from others in the sample. Despite this, many other variables, such as adverse childhood experiences, did not differentiate the serious, violent, and chronic offenders from the others.

The fifth paper in this special issue by Connie Hassett-Walker, Katrina Walsemann, Bethany Bell, Calley Fisk, Mark Shadden, and Weidan Zhou shifts focus to examine the impact of arrest on substance use. The paper title summarises the key research question under investigation: "How does early adulthood arrest alter substance use behaviour over the life course, and are there differential effects by gender and race/ethnicity?" Their examination of males and females in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth showed the labelling effects of arrest for the transition into binge drinking and marijuana use and also deterrence effects of arrest for desistance of marijuana use. These findings were most marked for males; the impact of arrest for females was less clear.

In the final paper of this special issue, “Gender Differences in Pathways to Delinquency: The Impact of Family Relationships and Adolescent Depression”, Veronica Herrera and Jeffrey Stuewig assessed experiences for 296 males and females in a 9-year longitudinal study in the USA. They demonstrated that exposure during childhood to family violence does not have a lasting impact in terms of adolescent delinquency; rather this relationship is mediated by disrupted family relationships in adolescence. They found that there was a pathway from concurrent adolescent depression and adolescent delinquency for both males and females but females were more likely to develop depressive symptoms as a result of disrupted family relationships.

Collectively, these papers demonstrate that knowledge regarding gendered experiences in developmental pathways to crime and the gendered nature of offending is moving forward. There is still much work to be done in this area and the authors of the papers in this special issue provide guidance in this regard. Broidy and Cauffman call for future research to examine the ways in which gender conditions the desistance mechanisms available to offenders and they also identify the need to examine external change mechanisms in different socio-historical time periods. Similarly Schwartz and Steffensmeier call for examination of the way in which historical contexts or circumstances can change the motivations and opportunities for crime for ‘males and females’. They also call for further investigation of how agency operates across social groupings and within individuals over their life-course, to produce different aggregate patterns and individual trajectories of offending. Wolff and his colleagues argue that future work should examine an expanded range of risk factors beyond those usually used to examine males, reasoning that there may be female-specific correlates for serious, violent, and chronic beyond the scope of their study. They also note that further investigation is needed of co-occurring disorders for females, later criminal careers of serious, violent, and chronic female offenders, and better measurement over time to more clearly disentangle causal pathways. Hassett-Walker and her colleagues call for further investigation of why labelling may affect men more than women noting that labelling theory as it stands does not account well for things like structural discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity or gender. Herrera and Stuewig call for further investigation of the reciprocal relationship between parenting and adolescent behaviour to better disentangle causal relationships.

So while our two special issues on the topic of gendered experiences in developmental pathways to crime clearly make a significant contribution to knowledge in this area, the authors of these papers have also highlighted that there is still much research to be undertaken on this topic.