



A Few Good Men: Evolutionary Psychology and Female Adolescent Aggression

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Criminologists have drawn attention to the fact that crime peaks in the teens and early 20s and that this pattern shows invariance over culture, history, offense, and sex. Wilson and Daly (1985) have proposed that among young, disadvantaged males, the age-crime curve reflects risky tactics aimed at averting "reproductive death." Though young women's rate of involvement in violent crime is much lower than men's, they also show a similar age-violence curve for assault. This paper proposes that this may be the result of aggressive mate selection among young women and that, under certain specified circumstances, women may engage in low-key intrasexual strategies in addition to epigamic strategies. This paper reviews material on sex differences in violent crime and in mate selection strategies, and offers predictions about the likely circumstances under which females will use intrasexual strategies. The scant available data on female adolescent fighting suggest that female-female assaults are more common than official statistical estimates and that they are frequently triggered by three key issues related to reproductive fitness: management of sexual reputation, competition over access to resource-rich young men, and protecting heterosexual relationships from takeover by rival women.

KEY WORDS: Aggression; Female; Mate selection.

Hirschi and Gottfredson (1983) make a compelling argument for the invariance of the age-crime curve. The association between youth and heightened crime rate, they argue, holds constant regardless of historical period, country, race, type of crime, and (most relevant for the present discussion) sex. While males far exceed females in the volume and rate

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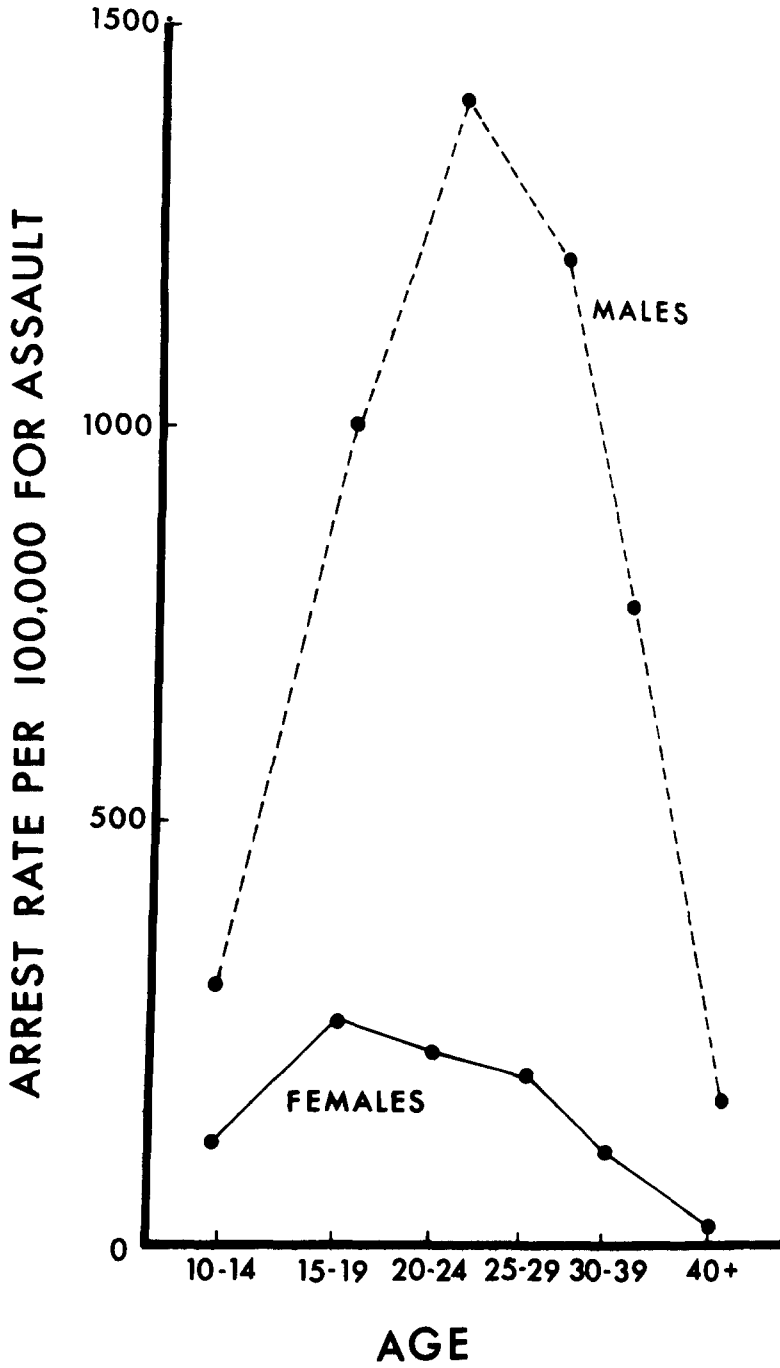


FIGURE 1. Arrest rates for assault by sex and age. Data from the United States Department of Justice 1989 (reported in Kruttschnitt 1994).

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