



## Delinquency, parental involvement, early adult criminality, and sex: Evidence of moderated mediation



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### A B S T R A C T

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One purpose of this study was to determine whether parental involvement, measured in late adolescence, mediates the relationship between delinquency in mid-adolescence and crime in early adulthood. This study's second purpose was to ascertain whether this relationship is moderated by sex, such that late adolescent parental involvement mediates the delinquency–crime relationship in females but not in males. A secondary analysis of data provided by 579 (272 males, 307 females) members of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-Child (NLSYC) was conducted in an effort to evaluate the possibility of moderated mediation in the relationship between delinquency at age 16, parental involvement at age 18, and criminality at age 24. Moderated mediation analysis, path analysis, and causal mediation analysis revealed the presence of a conditional indirect relationship between delinquency, parental involvement, and adult crime moderated by sex. These results are consistent with views on cumulative disadvantage and gendered pathways to crime.

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Schroeder, Giordano, and Cernkovich (2010) contend that researchers have largely ignored parents in the lives of late adolescents and young adults. Although peers tend to replace parents as the primary source of socialization in early adolescence (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006), there is no reason to believe that parental support and involvement play no role in the lives of mid- to late-adolescents. Hoeve, Dubas, Gerris, van der Laan, and Smeenk (2011), for instance, observed a relationship between neglectful parenting and late adolescent/early adult delinquency in boys and a link between permissive parenting and late adolescent/early adult delinquency in girls. They also note that families in which at least one parent displayed evidence of an authoritative parenting style had the lowest levels of offspring delinquency, whereas families with two neglectful parents had the highest levels of offspring delinquency. These results suggest that it is the quality of the parent–child relationship that is of critical importance in promoting and preventing future delinquency and that non-neglectful parenting, particularly on the part of the father, may play a key buffering role in reducing future antisocial behavior, even as adolescents approach adulthood.

Parental involvement has been described as a multifaceted and potentially value-laden construct (Bakker & Denissen, 2007). Nonetheless, it provides an alternative to the typological approach (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful) utilized by Hoeve et al. (2011) in their research on non-neglectful parenting. In an early study examining the effects of parental involvement on adolescent adjustment, Simons, Johnson, and Conger (1994) determined that the quality of parental involvement but not the quantity of corporal punishment predicted three adolescent outcomes: aggression, delinquency, and psychological disorder. From this, Simons et al. surmised that previous research denoting a relationship between the quantity of corporal punishment and the degree of aggression/delinquency may have been a statistical artifact of

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the inverse correlation that appears to exist between the quality of parental involvement and the quantity of corporal punishment. In a more recent study, Gault-Sherman (2012) identified a bidirectional inverse relationship between parental involvement and property delinquency, such that parental involvement increased as property crime decreased and property delinquency increased as parental involvement decreased. These findings indicate that parental involvement may be both a cause and an effect of delinquency/crime and could potentially serve as a mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986) of the past crime-future crime relationship.

The results of the previously mentioned Simons et al. (1994) study revealed that the quality of parental involvement predicted adolescent aggressiveness, delinquency, and psychological disorder irrespective of a participant's sex. Other studies, however, have found that female offspring tend to be more responsive to parental involvement than male offspring. Silverman and Caldwell (2005), for instance, determined that paternal emotional support and involvement correlated with decreased levels of impulsive delinquent behavior and increased levels of compliance in female juvenile offenders but not in male juvenile offenders. Still other studies indicate that the role of parental involvement may vary as a function of both gender and stage of adolescence. Worthen (2012), as a case in point, ascertained that a positive parent-child relationship correlated significantly with lower levels of delinquency in early adolescent girls but not in early adolescent boys. In middle and late adolescence, however, the pattern reversed itself: a positive parent-child relationship correlated with lower levels of delinquency in boys but not in girls. One principal weakness of this study, however, was that it was based on only the first wave of a multi-wave longitudinal investigation. Hence, the age comparisons (early, middle, and late adolescence) were cross-sectional rather than longitudinal and the correlations were concurrent rather than prospective.

Parental involvement can be viewed as a way augmenting a person's social capital in the sense that it encourages people to invest in social institutions; in this case, family relationships (Coleman, 1988). Sampson and Laub (1993) contend that people who accumulate larger amounts of social capital are less likely to engage in long-term deviance than people who accumulate smaller amounts of social capital. Through a process of cumulative advantage, individuals possessing higher levels of social capital experience an expanding array of opportunities for conventional living. Conversely, cumulative disadvantage is the process by which individuals with lower levels of social capital experience a shrinking pool of opportunities for conventional living. Although Sampson and Laub (1993) believe their theory is capable of explaining both male and female offending, the results of at least one study suggest that it may not be as applicable to females as it is to males (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002). There is a growing body of research, in fact, to suggest that physical and sexual victimization, economic marginalization, and substance abuse play a larger role in female offending than they do in male offending (Belknap, 2007; Hipwell & Loeber, 2006). One conclusion that can be drawn from this literature is that family and relationship issues, and hence parental involvement, are more consequential in initiating, maintaining, decreasing, and preventing crime in girls than in boys (Zahn et al., 2010).

The gendered pathways approach to criminology maintains that male and female pathways to recidivism are, on the whole, different, and that girls and women display patterns of delinquency and crime that are dissimilar to patterns commonly observed in boys and men. According to theorists like Chesney-Lind (1997), biological, psychological, and social differences between men and women lead to these divergent or gendered pathways to crime, delinquency, and recidivism. A recent study by Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009) identified three gendered pathways to crime in a group of 313 female probationers: (1) a victimization pathway marked by early child abuse, mental health difficulties, and substance misuse; (2) a relationship pathway characterized by dysfunctional intimate relationships, anxiety and depression, substance misuse, adult victimization, and low self-efficacy; (3) a social and human capital pathway in which weak family support, intimacy problems, and other manifestations of low social capital lead to diminished human capital (weak academics, low self-efficacy, poor occupational adjustment) and increased probability of future criminality.

The hypothesis tested in this study derives from a juxtaposition of two different theoretical models or viewpoints: Sampson and Laub's (1993) age-graded theory and the gendered pathways to crime approach (Chesney-Lind, 1997). Borrowing from Sampson and Laub's (1993) age-graded theory, the first part of the hypothesis tested in this study held that parental involvement would mediate the relationship between mid-adolescent delinquency and early adult crime. The second part of the hypothesis tested in this study borrowed from the gendered pathways to crime approach (Chesney-Lind, 1997) and held that the delinquency → parental involvement → adult crime relationship would be moderated by sex, in the sense that the effect would be stronger for girls than for boys.

## Method

### Participants

Participants for this study were 579 members of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979-Child Data (NLSY-C: Center for Human Resource Research, 2009) sample. The NLSY-C is composed of children born to females from the nationally representative NLSY79 sample. As of 2006, a total of 11,466 children had been identified as offspring of the original 6283 female NLSY79 respondents. The 579 individuals who served as subjects in the current investigation were born between 1980 and 1986, had been rated by their mothers on the Problem Behaviors Inventory (BPI: Peterson & Zill, 1986), had been rated by their mothers on a single question from the HOME-SF about whether one or both parents discussed television programs with the child when the child was between the ages of 6 and 8 years, and had provided complete answers to 5 questions regarding parental involvement at age 18 years. The gender breakdown of the current sample was 272 males (47.0%) and 307 females

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