

C008540 ABSTRACT: Every year, girls account for one out of four arrests of young people in America. Despite this, young women are almost always invisible when the delinquency "problem" is discussed and largely forgotten when programs for "delinquents" are crafted. This paper discusses characteristics of girls at risk, problems with traditional delinquency programs, and programming as if girls mattered.

Title What to do About Girls? Promising Perspectives and Effective Strategies.

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Type Paper

Source LaCrosse, WI: International Community Corrections Association, 1998.

Available From: ICCA Arlington Conference, P.O. Box 1987, LaCrosse, WI 54602,
(608) 785-0200.

Year 1998 **Length** 25 pages

Medium

Control No: 008540

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Delmar, NY 12054

www.prainc.com
(518) 439-7415

NB000011001

What to Do About Girls? Promising Perspectives and Effective Strategies

*Paper prepared for ICCA's 6th Annual Research Conference
September 27 - 30, 1998
Arlington, Virginia*



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WHAT TO DO ABOUT GIRLS? PROMISING PERSPECTIVES AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

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The author would like to thank Jennifer Koo and Joell Hokulani Yuen for their assistance in preparing this report.

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Executive Summary

“if you’re smart and strong enough and keep busy, you can stay out of trouble”

Female Ward, Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility

What to Do About Girls?

Promising Perspectives and Effective Programs

Every year, girls account for one out of four arrests of young people in America (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997: 219). Despite this, young women are almost always invisible when the delinquency “problem” is discussed and largely forgotten when programs for “delinquents” are crafted.

Characteristics of Girls at Risk

Girls at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system face problems related to school and community situations, family circumstances, and individual/peer characteristics (OJJDP, 1996). These problems are in many ways similar to those faced by boys, but they take on special dimensions as a result of the way gender works in the lives of young women.

Most clearly, young women residing in poverty-ridden and often **violent** communities face the greatest challenges of growing up optimally. Triply marginalized (by age, race, and gender), structural inequity and institutional racism haunt the lives of girls in these neighborhoods. Lack of educational and employment opportunities increases despair and the probability of engaging in self-destructive, delinquent activities (including horizontal violence against other girls); this is especially true for girls who reside in communities where crime and gang violence are prevalent (Ms. Foundation for Women, 1993; Artz, 1998).

Educational neglect is another salient risk factor related to youth involvement in delinquency. The American Correctional Association (ACA, 1990) found that 78% of female juvenile offenders had neither completed high school nor obtained a GED. Likewise, substance abuse is another prominent characteristic of particularly at-risk girls. Nearly two thirds of the girls in U.S. training schools need substance abuse treatment at intake and that over half are multiply addicted (ACA, 1990).

Related to the drug problem, are rates of sexual abuse which are disconcertingly high among at-risk girls. Girls in the juvenile justice system have experienced particularly high levels of abuse; over 60% have been the victim of some form of physical abuse and 54% reported being the victim of sexual abuse. Almost 90% of these girls report that the first incident of sexual and or physical abuse occurred before the age of 15 (ACA, 1990). Not surprising, a link between victimization and subsequent delinquent and or self-destructive behavior is evident.

Girls often respond to abuse by fighting back, "acting out," and running away from home. Studies show that over 70% of girls on the streets have run away to flee violence in their homes (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998). As a result, runaway girls are at further risk of victimization and often resort to prostitution, petty theft, and drug dealing to survive. The American Correctional Association (1990) reports that over 80% of girls in the system have run away from home, and a staggering 50% have run away from home six or more times.

Shortchanging Girls: Problems with Traditional Delinquency Programs

Alder points out that serving girls effectively will require different and innovative strategies since "young men tend to be more noticeable and noticed than young women" (Alder 1995, 3). Girls involved in the juvenile justice system are particularly invisible in terms of programming. As an example, one national study of 443 delinquency program evaluations done since 1950 revealed that 34.8% of these programs only served males and 42.4% served primarily boys. Conversely, only a meager 2.3% of delinquency programs served only girls, and 5.9% served primarily girls (Lipsey, 1992). Other surveys of youth programming show similar levels of programmatic neglect of girls issues (Siegal, 1995; Ms Foundation, 1993; Valentine Foundation, 1990).

The Minnesota Women's Fund noted that the most frequent risk factors for girls and boys differ, and that for girls the list includes: emotional stress, physical and sexual abuse, negative body image, disordered eating, suicide and pregnancy. For boys the list included: alcohol, polydrug use, accidental injury, and delinquency (cited in Adolescent Female Subcommittee 1994). While clearly not all girls at risk will end up in the juvenile justice system, this gendered examination of youth problems sets a standard for examination of delinquency prevention and intervention programs.

Most programs and services are narrowly focused on a specific, often stereotypical issue to the exclusion of inter-relating factors that place young women at risk. Programs tend to emphasize a single issue, often teen pregnancy and mothering, they may focus on substance abuse, sexual abuse, or more recently gang violence; these patterns are largely a result of issue-specific funding initiatives that have been concerned with one "problem" at a time. Similarly, programs tend to be more intervention oriented than preventive, concentrating more on girls who are already in trouble than on girls who are at-risk of getting into trouble (Ms. Foundation for Women, 1993).

Programming as if Girls Mattered

Effective girls' programs should address the following: dealing with the physical and sexual violence in their lives (from parents, boyfriends, pimps, and others), confronting the risk of HIV/AIDS, dealing with pregnancy and motherhood, drug and alcohol dependency, facing family problems, employment training and unemployment, finding safe housing, managing stress, and developing a sense of efficacy and empowerment. Many of these needs are universal and should be part of programs for all youth (Schwartz and Orlando 1991). However, most of these are particularly important for young women.

Programs must also be scrutinized to assure that they are culturally specific as well as gender specific. As increasing numbers of girls of color are drawn into the juvenile justice system (and bootstrapped into correctional settings), while their white counterparts are deinstitutionalized, there is a need for programs to be rooted in specific cultures. Since it is clear that girls of color have different experiences of their gender, as well as different experiences with the dominant institutions in the

society (Amaro and Agular 1994; Amaro 1995; Orenstein 1994; LaFromboise and Howard-Pitney 1995), programs to divert and deinstitutionalize must be shaped by the unique developmental issues confronting minority girls, as well as building in the specific cultural resources available in ethnic communities.

Given what is known about at-risk girls' characteristics, problems, and needs, what can girls' programs do to help? Programs, particularly those that are issue-specific, need to provide transition and after-care services that support young women in maintaining the progress they have made. Girls' programs also need to create separate time and space for girls, apart from boys, so that issues related to sexism will not be overshadowed by boys' more disruptive behavior.

Programs, particularly prevention programs for girls, need to begin at earlier ages than is currently the case. Many at-risk girls may engage in delinquent behavior simply because there is little else to occupy their free time. Structured recreation which gets past the "girl's watching boy's play sports" approach should be vigorously explored. Girls already embedded within the juvenile justice system frequently state that had they had opportunities to engage in meaningful, interesting activities, they probably would not have fallen into the system. In the words of one girl at the Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility, having "something to do, like a job or something" could have helped her to be delinquency-free. Likewise, another girl in the facility stated that "if you're smart and strong enough and keep busy, you can stay out of trouble" (Chesney-Lind, et al., p.45).

Finally, programs should invariably work to empower girls and advocate for change that will benefit girls. This entails not only building on girls innate strengths, skills, and creativity to develop their voices and their abilities to assert themselves, but also identifying and challenging barriers that girls, particularly marginalized girls, face in our society.

“if you’re smart and strong enough and keep busy, you can stay out of trouble”

Female Ward, Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility

“For years people have assumed that all you have to do to make a program designed for boys work for girls is to paint the walls pink and take out the urinals”

Marian Daniels, Female Intervention Team, Baltimore, Maryland, 1996

Every year, girls account for one out of four arrests of young people in America (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997). Despite this, young women are almost always forgotten when programs for “delinquents” are discussed.

An exception to this generalization were the 1992, hearings held in conjunction with the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, which addressed for the first time the “provision of services to girls within the juvenile justice system.”¹ As a result of this hearing, states were asked to review their services to youth with a specific focus on gender specific services, and they were also given an opportunity to get federal aid to improve on girl’s services through challenge grants. Twenty three states embarked on such programs—by far the most popular of the ten possible challenge grant activity areas.²

Such attention is long overdue, and such enthusiasm is much needed and welcome. Not only is little known about the girl delinquent, for years, programs have endeavored to respond to girls problems either by ignoring girls completely or assuming that models built around the needs of male adolescents, will address girls needs as well.

Are Girls Getting “Meaner”? The Shape of Contemporary Female Delinquency

Shortly after the American Association of University Women’s study documented the dramatic, and wide-spread drop in the self-esteem of girls during early adolescence (AAUW, 1992), a curious thing happened in the media. There was a dramatic surge of journalistic interest in girls, often girls of color, engaged in nontraditional, masculine behavior—notably joining gangs, carrying guns, and fighting with other girls.

The fascination with a “new,” violent female offender is not really new, however. In the nineteen seventies, a notion emerged that the women’s movement had “caused” a surge in women’s serious crimes, but this discussion focused largely on an imagined increase in crimes of adult women usually white women (see Chesney-Lind 1997). The current discussion, though, has settled on girls’ commission of violent crimes, often in youth gangs. Indeed, there has been a veritable siege of these news stories with essentially the same theme—today girls are more violent, they are in gangs, and their behavior does not fit the traditional stereotype of girl’s delinquency.

On August 2, 1993, for example, in a feature spread on teen violence *Newsweek* had a box entitled “Girls will be Girls” which noted that “some girls now carry guns. Others hide razor blades in their mouths” (Leslie et al., 1993: 44). Explaining this trend, the article notes that “The plague of teen violence is an equal-opportunity scourge. Crime by girls is on the rise, or so various jurisdictions report” (Leslie et al. 1993, 44). More recently, the *Boston Globe Magazine* ran a cover story on girls

and violence. Against a backdrop of large red letters reading BAD GIRLS, read a text saying “girls are moving into the world of violence that once belonged to boys” (Ford 1998).

A review of girls’ arrests for violent crime for the last decade (1987-1996) initially seems to provide support for the notion that girls have become more violent. Arrests of girls for all Part One Offenses³ violent offenses were up 118.1 percent (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1997, 219), and arrests of girls for “other assaults” were up 142.6 percent. But a closer look at these and other data on girl’s violent behavior presents a more complex picture.

First, and most importantly, boy’s arrests for these offenses have been climbing sharply as well; as a result, girls’ share of serious crimes of violence has changed only slightly during the two time periods. In 1987, arrests of girls accounted for 11 percent of all arrests of youth for serious crimes of violence; in 1996, the comparable figure was 15 percent (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1997, 219). Second, serious crimes of violence still constitute only a small proportion of all girls’ delinquency, and that figure has remained essentially unchanged. Only 2.0% of girls’ arrests in 1987 were for serious crimes of violence. By 1996, this figure had climbed to 2.9 percent (13,995 arrests out of a total of 481,164 arrests) (compared to 5.6 percent of boy’s arrests).

But what about those increases, particularly in “other assaults”? Relabeling of behaviors that were once categorized as status offenses (noncriminal offenses like “runaway” and “person in need of supervision”) into violent offenses cannot be ruled out in explanations of arrest rate shifts, nor can changes in police practices with reference to domestic violence. A review of the over two thousand cases of girls referred to Maryland’s juvenile justice system for “person-to-person” offenses revealed that virtually all of these offenses (97.9%) involved “assault.” A further examination of these records revealed that about half were “family centered” and involved such activities as “a girl hitting her mother and her mother subsequently pressing charges” (Mayer 1994).

Other mechanisms for relabeling status offenses into criminal offenses include charging the youth with “assault” that arise out of disputes with their parents. As an example, a young woman in Florida tried to run away after an argument with her step-father. As she was attempting to leave, her mother grabbed her by the hair, and in response to this she hit her mother. She was arrested and charged with two counts of “battery” (which in that state requires mandatory detention) for this incident (Wright, 1998). Such relabeling, which is also called bootstrapping, has been particularly pronounced in the official delinquency of African American girls (Robinson 1990; Bartollas 1993), and this practice also facilitates the incarceration of girls in detention facilities and training schools—something that would not be possible if the girl were arrested for non-criminal status offenses.

When exploring the dramatic increases in the arrests of girls for “other assaults” (which increased by 142.6 percent in the last decade), it is also likely that enforcement practices have dramatically narrowed the gender gap. Minor or “other” assaults can range from school yard tussles to relatively serious, but not life threatening assaults (Steffensmeier and Steffensmeier 1980). These authors first noted an increasing tendency to arrest girls for these offenses in the seventies and commented that ‘evidence suggests that female arrests for “other assaults’ are relatively non-serious in nature and tend to consist of being bystanders or companions to males involved in skirmishes, fights, and so on’ (Steffensmeier and Steffensmeier 1980, 70). Currie adds to this the fact that these “simple assaults without injury” are often “attempted” or “threatened” or “not completed” (Currie 1998, 40). At a time when official concern about youth violence is almost unparalleled and school principals are

increasingly likely to call police onto their campuses, it should come as no surprise that youthful arrests in this area are up.

Detailed comparisons drawn from supplemental homicide reports from unpublished FBI data also hint at the central, rather than peripheral way in which gender colored and differentiated girl's and boy's violence. A study of these FBI data on the characteristics of girls' and boys' homicides between 1984 and 1993, found that girls accounted for "proportionately fewer homicides in 1993 (6%) than in 1984 (14%)" (Loper and Cornell 1996, 324). Their work shows that girl's choice of weapons differed from boys so that in comparison to boys' homicides, girls who killed were more likely to use a knife than a gun and to murder someone as a result of conflict (rather than in the commission of a crime). Girls were also more likely than boys to murder family members (32 percent) and very young victims (24 percent of their victims were under the age of three compared to 1 percent of the boy's victims) (Loper and Cornell 1996, 328). When involved in a peer homicide, girls were more likely than boys to have killed "as a result of an interpersonal conflict;" in addition girls were more likely to kill alone, while boys were more likely to kill with an accomplice (Loper and Cornell 1996, 328). The authors concluded that "the stereotype of girls becoming gun-toting robbers was not supported. The dramatic increase in gun-related homicides...applies to boys but not girls" (Loper and Cornell 1996, 332).

Finally, a note about self-report data. These have always shown that girls committed more assaults than official statistics reflected (see Chesney-Lind and Shelden 1997). A summary of recent studies on self-reported aggression also reflects that while about a third of girls reported having been in a physical fight in the last year, this was true of over half of the boys in both samples (Girls Incorporated 1996,13). Girls are far more likely to fight with a parent or sibling (34 percent compared to 9 percent), whereas boys are more likely to fight with friends or strangers. Finally, boys are twice to three times more likely to report carrying a weapon in the past month (Girls Incorporated 1996,13). (see Table 1)

Table 1: Actual and Potential Involvement in Physical Violence.

	Females	Males	Source
Involved In:	%	%	
Physical fight in past year	34	51	Adams et al.
Four or more physical fights in the past year	32	51	Kann et al.
Fought With:	9	15	Adams et al.
Stranger	7	15	Adams et al.
Friend	24	46	Adams et al.
date/romantic partner	8	2	Adams et al.
parent/sibling	34	9	Adams et al.
Other	4	6	Adams et al.
several of the above	24	26	Adams et al.
Carried a Weapon:			
In the past month	7	17	Adams et al.
	9	34	Kann et al.

Adams et al. (1995: ages 14-17,1992 data) and Kann et al (1995: grades 9-12,1993 data) in Girls. Inc. 1996.

Trends in self-report data of youthful involvement in violent offenses also fail to show the dramatic changes found in official statistics. Specifically, a matched sample of "high risk" youth (aged 13-17) surveyed in the 1977 National Youth Study and the more recent 1989 Denver Youth Survey revealed

significant *decreases* in girls' involvement in felony assaults, minor assaults, and hard drugs, and no change in a wide range of other delinquent behaviors—including felony theft, minor theft, and index delinquency (Huizinga 1997).

Finally, girl's behavior, including violence, needs to be put in its patriarchal context. In her analysis of self-reported violence in girls in Canada, Artz (1998) has done precisely that, and the results were striking. First, she noted that violent girls reported significantly greater rates of victimization and abuse than their non-violent counterparts, and that girls who were violent reported great fear of sexual assault, especially from their boyfriends. Specifically, one in five violent girls felt they were physically abused at home compared to one in ten violent males, and only 6.3% of nonviolent girls. Patterns for sexual abuse were even starker; roughly one out of four violent girls had been sexually abused compared to one in ten of nonviolent girls (Artz 1998, 47). Follow-up interviews with a small group of violent girls found that the girl's had learned at home that "might makes right" and engaged in "horizontal violence" directed at other powerless girls (often with boys as the audience). Certainly, these findings provide little ammunition for those who would contend that the "new," violent girl is a product of any form of "emancipation".

While the media has focused attention on girl's violent, nontraditional delinquency, most of girl's delinquency is not of that sort at all. Examining the types of offenses for which girls are actually arrested, it is clear that most are arrested for the less serious criminal acts and status offenses (non-criminal offenses for which only youth can be taken into custody like "running away from home"). In 1995, well over half of girls' arrests were for either larceny theft (25.8%) much of which, particularly for girls, is shoplifting (Shelden and Horvath 1986) or status offenses (23.4%). Boys' arrests were far more dispersed.

Running away from home and prostitution remain the only two arrest categories where more girls than boys are arrested, and despite the intention of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act in 1974, which, among other things, encouraged jurisdictions to divert and de-institutionalize youth charged with status offenses, arrests for these have been climbing in recent years. Between 1987 and 1996, for example, girls' runaway arrests increased by 20.7 percent, and arrests of girls for curfew violations increased by 155.2 percent. (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1997, 219).

Status offenses have always played a significant role among the offenses that bring girls into the juvenile justice system. They accounted for about a quarter all girls' arrests in 1996, but less than ten percent of boys' arrests—figures that remained relatively stable during the last decade. In 1996, over half (57.5%) of those arrested for one status offense—running away from home—were girls (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1997, 219).

Why are girls more likely to be arrested than boys for running away from home? There are no simple answers to this question. Studies of actual delinquency (not simply arrests) show that girls and boys run away from home in about equal numbers. As an example, Canter (1982) found in a National Youth Survey that there was no evidence of greater female involvement, compared to males, in any category of delinquent behavior. Indeed, in this sample, males were significantly more likely than females to report status offenses.

There is some evidence to suggest that parents and police may be responding differently to the same behavior. Parents may be calling the police when their daughters do not come home, and police may be more likely to arrest a female than a male runaway youth.

Another reason for different responses to running away from home speaks to differences in the reasons that boys and girls have for running away. Girls are, for example, much more likely than boys to be the victims of child sexual abuse with some experts estimating that roughly 70% of the victims of child sexual abuse are girls (Finkelhor and Baron 1986). Not surprisingly, the evidence is also suggesting a link between this problem and girl's delinquency—particularly running away from home.

Studies of girls on the streets or in court populations are showing high rates of both sexual and physical abuse. A study of a runaway shelter in Toronto found, for example, that 73% of the female runaways and 38% of the males had been sexually abused. This same study found that sexually abused female runaways were more likely than their non-abused counterparts to engage in delinquent or criminal activities such as substance abuse, petty theft, and prostitution. No such pattern was found among the male runaways (McCormack and Janus 1986).

Detailed studies of youth entering the juvenile justice system in Florida have compared the “constellations of problems” presented by girls and boys entering detention (Dembo, Williams and Schmeidler 1993; Dembo et al. 1995). These researchers have found that female youth were more likely than male youth to have abuse histories and contact with the juvenile justice system for status offenses, while male youth had higher rates of involvement with various delinquent offenses. Further research on a larger cohort of youth (N=2104) admitted to an assessment center in Tampa concluded that “girls’ problem behavior commonly relates to an abusive and traumatizing home life, whereas boys’ law violating behavior reflects their involvement in a delinquent life style” (Dembo et al. 1995, 21).

Putting Girls’ Crime in Context:

About one girl in twenty will have some contact with the juvenile justice system (Girls Incorporated, 1996). Data on the many and varied problems presented by this group of young women suggest a need to focus on a variety of risk factors related to school and community situations, family circumstances, and individual/peer characteristics (Girls Incorporated 1996; Chesney-Lind and Shelden 1998).

Young women residing in poverty-ridden and violent communities face the greatest challenges of growing up optimally. Structural inequity and institutional racism impede girls of marginalized backgrounds from obtaining quality educations and employment, accessing resources, and developing positive life choices. Lack of opportunity increases despair and the possibility of engaging in self-destructive, delinquent activities; this is especially true for girls who reside in communities where crime and gang violence are prevalent (Ms. Foundation for Women 1993). Sometimes, perceived economic necessity leads girls to actually commit crime. The American Correctional Association (1990) reports that 9% of their girls broke laws because of economic pressures and an additional 9% to pay for drugs.

Academic failure is another salient risk factor related to youth involvement in delinquency. The American Correctional Association (1990) found that 78% of female juvenile offenders had neither completed high school nor obtained a GED. A staggering 12% had not even gone beyond elementary school. Of the population that did attend school, 29% were enrolled in a vocational or technical program. Another study that focused on the educational backgrounds of incarcerated women in three states revealed that 46% of them had been expelled, 28% had repeated a grade and 26% had been

placed in a special class (Acoca and Austin, 1996). In addition, this population tends to have a disproportionate number of girls with learning disabilities .

Research indicates that girls, in general, are seven times more likely than boys to drop out of school for family reasons, such as needing to care for siblings, elderly relatives, as well as perhaps their own children (Fine and Zane 1989). Girl offenders, in particular, drop out of school because they are pregnant (27%) or because they are parents and need to care for their kids (20%). Many also leave school simply out of boredom and inability to get along with their teachers. Likewise, they feel that their studies are difficult and unrewarding (American Correctional Association 1990). Clearly, programming geared towards the end of school success needs to be an integral part of services to at-risk girls.

Substance abuse is another prominent characteristic of particularly at risk girls. The American Correctional Association's study of state training schools for girls in the juvenile justice system (1990) found that 60% of this population need substance abuse treatment at intake and that over half are multiply addicted. They also reported that almost 50% of their girls took drugs (34.4%) or drank alcohol (11.4%) as a form of self-medication to make themselves feel better. In addition, a vast majority stated that they used alcohol (50%) and marijuana (64%) regularly. Of the girls who are substance -dependent, most first started using them between the ages of 12 and 15. Although models that delineate the relationship between delinquency and substance abuse have largely involved adolescent males, evidence for females also indicates that substance abuse is highly correlated with disruptive behavior (Girls Incorporated 1996).

As was mentioned earlier, rates of sexual abuse are disconcertingly high among at-risk girls. Girls in the juvenile justice system have experienced particularly outrageous levels of abuse; over 60% have been the victim of some form of physical abuse and 54% reported being the victim of sexual abuse. Almost 90% of these girls report that the first incident of sexual and or physical abuse occurred before the age of 15 (American Correctional Association 1990). Estimates of the general population of girls at large indicate that a disconcerting 34% will suffer some form of abuse before they reach adulthood (Benson 1990). Not surprising, a link between victimization and subsequent delinquent and or self-destructive behavior is evident.

Girls often respond to abuse by fighting back, "acting out," and running away from home (Girls Incorporated 1996). Studies show that over 70% of girls on the streets have run away to flee violence in their homes (Chesney-Lind and Shelden 1998). As a result, runaway girls are at further risk of victimization and often resort to prostitution, petty theft, and drug dealing to survive. The American Correctional Association (1990) reports that over 80% of girls in the system have run away from home, and a staggering 50% have run away from home six or more times.

Even girls who are not at-risk for delinquency, per se, are at-risk of not developing optimally. Perhaps the most devastating blow is to a girl's self-esteem. An American Association of University Women study (1992) reported that girls at age nine have higher self-concepts of themselves and their abilities than adolescent girls; thus indicating that girls' self-esteem diminishes drastically during adolescence. These negative self-concepts coincide with girls' disproportionate risk for distorted body images, eating disorders and chronic dieting. Not surprisingly, girls experience higher levels of stress as a result of internalizing their distress and problems. Two large studies have shown that girls are twice as likely than boys to experience depression (Allgood-Merten, Lewisohn, and Hops 1990; Whitaker, et al. 1990); interestingly, one of these studies linked girls' depression to dissatisfaction

with their physical appearance. Girls also make more suicide attempts than boys (Pipher 1994; Miller 1994). In essence, girls are in grave jeopardy of not developing and maintaining psychological resilience.

Shortchanging Girls: Patterns within Youth Serving Programs

Alder (1986; 1995) points out that programs often overlook girls since "young men tend to be more noticeable and noticed than young women" (Alder 1995, 3). When girls go out, they tend to move in smaller groups, there are greater proscriptions against girls "hanging out," and they may be justly fearful of being on the streets at night. Finally, girls have many more domestic expectations than their boy counterparts, and these may keep them confined to their homes. Girls needs are, in short, easier to ignore.

Such clearly seems to be the case when the evidence is reviewed on the manner in which traditional youth programming has dealt with girls needs. As an example, an exhaustive review delinquency prevention and intervention programs, found a concern about girls almost completely absent. A study of 443 delinquency program evaluations done since 1950 revealed that 34.8% of these programs only served males and 42.4% served primarily boys. Conversely, only a meager 2.3% of delinquency programs served only girls, and 5.9% served primarily girls (Lipsey 1992).

Because the majority of delinquency prevention programs are co-ed, the specific needs of girls are either shortchanged or simply ignored because of the population of boys who outnumber them. Programs that are single-sex within the justice system provide far more options for boys than for girls. In fact, a list of "potentially promising programs" identified by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention cites 24 programs specifically for boys in contrast to only 2 programs specifically for girls (Girls Incorporated 1996). Ironically, one program geared for incarcerated teen fathers has no counterpart for incarcerated teen mothers.

Further, programs for young women in general (and delinquents, in particular) have been of low priority in our society as far as funding is concerned. A review of seventy-five private foundations in 1989, revealed that funding "targeted specifically for girls and women hovered around 3.4 percent" (Valentine Foundation 1990, 5).

General recreational services appear to be no better; a 1993 study of the San Francisco Chapter of the National Organization for Women found that only 8.7% of the programs funded by the major city organization funding children and youth programs "specifically addressed the needs of girls" (Siegal 1995, 18). Not surprisingly, then, a 1995 study of youth participation in San Francisco after school or summer sports programs found only 26% of the participants were girls (Siegal 1995, 20).

Often programs tend to miss the "at risk" years for girls. A comprehensive survey of 112 individual youth-oriented programs (for both delinquent and non-delinquent youth) showed less than 8% provided services to girls between the ages of 9 and 15, the crucial determining years of adolescence, and years when girls self-esteem plummets (AAUW 1992). Rather, services and programs tended to serve girls younger than the age of 9 and teenagers between 14 and 21 years of age.

Moreover, the few programs available for girls are often tend to address single issues, often teen pregnancy and mothering, though occasionally other problems like substance abuse or gang behavior. This pattern is largely a result of issue-specific funding initiatives, but it means that girl's

often interconnected and overlapping problems get ignored. Similarly, programs tend to be more intervention oriented than preventive, concentrating more on girls who are already in trouble than on girls who are at-risk of getting into trouble (Ms. Foundation for Women 1993).

Unfortunately, data reveals that at-risk youth possess high degrees of overlap in services needed; thus, girls who are drug addicts may also have histories of being abused, suicidal tendencies, academic difficulties, and or be in need of gainful employment. Patterns of multiple service needs are unfortunately increasing just as public funding to meet these needs has proportionally decreased. Ultimately, at-risk youth's multiple needs points to the necessity of more comprehensive programming than is available within any one given program or system. Some research has suggested the need for inter-agency, inter-disciplinary collaborations to address these needs (Arella 1992).

Ms. Foundation for Women's study on girls' programs (1993) found that most programs typically respond to the outcome or symptom of girls' distress, rather than addressing the underlying, structural problems of inequality and poverty that affect many young women. In addition, few programs addressed the special problems that girls of color experience. Likewise, programs geared specifically to the needs of lesbian and bisexual girls and girls with disabilities are virtually non-existent. In general, programs do not provide services within a context that acknowledges the realities of sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism as problematic forces in their lives. Thus, little is offered in the way of giving girls the information and support needed to fathom and combat these mechanisms of multiple marginality (Ms. Foundation for Women 1993).

Are Gender-Specific Programs Necessary?

Despite the mounting evidence that while girls have rather severe problems, youth programs have in the main ignored girls (or assumed that programs crafted to meet boys' needs will also work for girls), some would contend that the jury is still out on the need for gender specific programming. Indeed, there appears to be the belief in some critical quarters within the juvenile justice system, that gender specific programming is unnecessary. In a recent General Accounting Office study (GAO 1995), the results of a national survey of chief probation officers were reported. The GAO noted that while these juvenile court officials felt there "insufficient facilities and services were available to status offenders" (GAO 1995, 3), they also believed that status offenders do not gender-specific services, except for gynecological services and pre-natal care" (GAO 1995, 4). They also reported that these same high level court administrators did not feel that "any significant gender-bias concerns" emerged in the treatment of female and male status offenders (GAO 1995, 3).

This perspective on girls' delinquency and a lack of interest in girls special needs, is both ironic and yet consistent with juvenile justice system's checkered past with reference to the treatment of girls. While currently the court is embracing and valorizing equal treatment largely as a way to justify current practices and avoid change, early court history, did just the reverse. Indeed, a careful reading of the situation of girl and women offenders seems to reveal that whether we are in a legal and social environment that supports "equal treatment" or one that argues for "special treatment," girls and women tend to be the losers.

As an example, the special concern girls' morality was at the center, rather than at the periphery, of the movement that established the juvenile court (Platt 1969; Odem 1995; Kunzel 1993). As a result, in the earliest years of the court, girls were frequently institutionalized for such offenses as "sexual

immorality” or “waywardness” and well into the seventies, contemporary “status offenses” such as runaway often functioned as “buffer charges” for the court’s concern about the sexual behavior of girls (see Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1997 for a discussion of these issues).

Correctional reformers, concerned about abuse of the status offense category by juvenile courts (though not necessarily about girls), were instrumental in urging the U.S. Congress to pass the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974. This legislation required that states receiving federal delinquency prevention moneys begin to divert and de institutionalize their status offenders. Despite erratic enforcement of this provision and considerable resistance from juvenile court judges, girls were the clear beneficiaries of the reform. Incarceration of young women in training schools and detention centers across the country fell dramatically in the decades since its passage, in distinct contrast to patterns found early in the century.

National statistics on girls’ incarceration reflect both the official enthusiasm for the incarceration of girls during the early part of this century and the impact of the JJDP Act of 1974. Girls’ share of the population of juvenile correctional facilities increased from 1880 (when girls were 19 percent of the population) to 1923 (when girls were 28 percent). By 1950, girls had climbed to 34 percent of the total, and in 1960 they were still 27 percent of those in correctional facilities. By 1980, this pattern appeared to have reversed, and girls were again 19 percent of those in correctional facilities (Calahan 1986, 130). In 1993, girls comprised 10.3 percent of those held in public detention centers and training schools (Hsieh 1998).

Despite its success in reducing the number of status offenders, and hence girls, in facilities, the reform effort faced broad resistance from the outset. In 1980, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges was able to narrow the definition of a status offender in the amended act so that any child who had violated a “valid court order” would no longer be covered under the de institutionalization provisions (United States Statutes at Large 1981). This change effectively gutted the 1974 JJDP act by permitting judges to reclassify a status offender who violated a court order as a delinquent. This meant that a young woman who ran away from a court ordered placement (a halfway house, foster home, etc.) could be re-labeled a delinquent and locked up.

Judges have long engaged in efforts like “violation of a valid court order” or issuing contempt citations to “bootstrap” status offenders into categories that permit their detention. They thereby circumvent the de institutionalization component of the act (Costello and Worthington 1981 1982, 42).

These judicial maneuvers clearly disadvantage girls. For example, a Florida study (Bishop and Frazier 1992) reviewed 162,012 cases referred to juvenile justice intake units during 1985-1987. The researchers found only a weak pattern of discrimination against female status offenders compared to the treatment of male status offenders. However, when they examined the impact of contempt citations, the pattern changed markedly. They found that females offenders referred for contempt were more likely than females referred for other criminal type offenses to be petitioned to court, and substantially more likely to be petitioned to court than males referred for contempt. Moreover, the girls were far more likely than boys to be sentenced to detention. Specifically, the typical female offender in their study had a probability of incarceration of 4.3%, which increased to 29.9% if she was held in contempt. Such a pattern was not observed among the males in the study. The authors conclude that “the traditional double standard is still operative. Clearly neither the cultural changes associated with the feminist movement nor the legal changes illustrated in the JJDP Act’s mandate to

de institutionalize status offenders have brought about equality under the law for young men and women” (Bishop and Frazier 1992, 1186).

During the early part of this decade, things seemed to be turning around for girls. Hearings held in 1992 in conjunction with the re authorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, addressed for the first time the “provision of services to girls within the juvenile justice system” (United States House of Representatives 1992). At this hearing, both the double standard of juvenile justice was discussed, as well as the paucity of services for girls. The chair of the hearing, Rep. Matthew Martinez noted the high number of girls arrested for status offenses, the high percentage of girls in detention as a result of violation of court orders, and the failure of the system to address girls’ needs. He ended with the question, “I wonder why, why are there no other alternatives than youth jail for her?” (United States House of Representatives 1992, 2).

As a result of this landmark hearing, the 1992 re authorization of the act included specific provisions requiring plans from each state receiving federal funds to include “an analysis of gender-specific services for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency, including the types of such services available and the need for such services for females and a plan for providing needed gender-specific services for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency” (Public Law 102-586—November 1992). Additional moneys were set aside as part of the JJDP Act’s challenge grant program for states wishing to develop policies to prohibit gender bias in placement and treatment and to develop programs that assure girls equal access to services. As a result, 23 states embarked on such programs—by far the most popular of the ten possible challenge grant activity areas (Girls Incorporated 1996, 26). Finally, the legislation moved to make the “bootstrapping” of status offenders more difficult (United States House of Representatives 1992, 4983).

Sadly, these changes, while extremely hopeful, were short-lived, and the policy backlash was not long in coming. Currently, congress is undertaking a major overhaul of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, and virtually all of the initiatives being considered are ominous for girls. The bills introduced to date intend to refocus national attention on the “violent and repeat juvenile offender” (read boys) while also granting states “flexibility” in implementing the four core mandates of the JD Act. Key among these mandates, of course, is the deinstitutionalization of status offenders, though conservative lawmakers are also taking aim at efforts to separate youth from adults in correctional facilities, efforts to reduce minority over-representation in juvenile detention and training schools, and efforts to remove juveniles from adult jails (National Criminal Justice Association, 1997, 2-3). The special funds set aside to encourage gender specific programming would also disappear in all the versions of these bills currently under consideration.

Most ominous for girls are efforts loosen restrictions on the detention of status offenders. Take Senate Bill 10, entitled the “Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act of 1997”: it allows for the incarceration of runaways if a hearing determines “the behavior of the juvenile constitutes a clear and present danger to the juvenile’s physical or emotional well being” or when “secure detention is necessary for guarding the safety of the juvenile” or finally when “the detention is necessary...to obtain a suitable placement” (CJJ 8/8/97, p. 2). Both house and senate bills currently under consideration weaken the 1992 initiatives in the area of the detention of youth for violation of a valid court order.

Even more worrisome, all the bills make it easier to hold youth in adult jails. The later provision is most disturbing, since girls were not infrequently held in such situations in the past (as de facto

detention centers in rural America). Sadly, abuse is not uncommon in such settings. In Ohio, for example, a fifteen year old girl was sexually assaulted by a deputy jailer after having been placed in an adult jail for a minor infraction (Ziedenberg and Schiraldi 1997, 2). Due to the isolation and abuse in these settings, girls are also at great risk for suicide (see Chesney-Lind 1988).

This brief review suggests that whether equity or difference is the legal standard of the day, girls who come into the family court system have found what one scholar in the area has characterized as “partial justice” (Rafter 1990). Indeed, so problematic is this history that some scholars have concluded that the juvenile justice system’s long history of paternalism and sexism makes it a problematic site for gender-specific services (Kempf-Leonard, 1998). Certainly, the existence of such “services” should not be used as justification for incarcerating girls, and girl-specific programming should never be an excuse to return to the good old days of girl’s institutions where working class girls were trained in the womanly arts.

There are, though, larger issues at stake in this debate about the need for gender specific programming within the juvenile justice system and the larger congressional backlash against de-institutionalization. The 1992 congressional action emerged from a long overdue recognition that the juvenile justice system has not done well by girls. Now, the risk is that juvenile justice system, which is seeing increasing numbers of young women, will go back to a long tradition of ignoring girls’ serious problems at the same time that it actively re-criminalizes their survival strategies.

Programming as if Girls Mattered: Getting Past Girl’s Watching Boy’s Play Sports

Girls in trouble, particularly those in the juvenile justice system, share many problems with their male counterparts. They are likely to be poor, to have come from disrupted and violent families, and to be having difficulties in school. In addition, they confront sexual abuse, sexual assaults, unplanned pregnancies, and adolescent motherhood.

Programming for girls in the juvenile justice system needs to take into consideration girls’ unique situations and their special problems in a gendered society. Traditional delinquency treatment strategies, employed in both preventive and intervention programs, have been shaped largely by common sense assumptions about what youths—generally boys—need. Sometimes girls will benefit from these assumptions and sometimes not. As Marian Daniel, area director with Baltimore’s Female Intervention Team, succinctly put it: “for year’s people have assumed that all you have to do to make a program designed for boys work for girls is to paint the walls pink and take out the urinals” (Daniel cited in *Girls Incorporated* 1996, 34).

Lack of Validated Gender-Specific Programs; Programming and the “Forgotten Few”

Readers convinced of the need for gender specific programs will be disappointed if they expect to find descriptions of many innovative, effective programs for girls that have been rigorously evaluated. Essentially, as Bergsmann once noted in her national review of programming for female offenders in the juvenile justice system, these girls the “forgotten few” (Bergsmann 1989). Many evaluations of particular approaches do not deal with gender issues and frequently the evaluated programs do not even serve girls. Further, programs that have been evaluated are often run in training schools—not the best setting to try out a particular strategy. Moreover, evaluations of most programs tend to show that even the most determined efforts to help often yield poor results. Of course, the last

two points may be related; programs in closed institutional settings are at a disadvantage and consequently tend to be less effective (Lipsey 1992).

Readers also might hope to see a more extensive consideration and evaluation of promising, community-based programs for girls, but these have been few and far between (for an exception see Artz and Riecken 1997). Indeed, in the main, we have descriptions of very programs in recent publications, but virtually no solid, empirical research on program effectiveness.

Challenge Grant Activities

A good snap-shot of where we are nationally on girl’s issues and girl’s programming can come from a brief overview of the activities of the twenty three states that successfully applied for challenge grant funds from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This review indicates that most states are in the very early stages of understanding the needs of girls in their systems. As a result, of the states where information is available (N=21),⁴ virtually all (95 percent) used some these funds to gather data on the characteristics and needs of the girls in their systems. Slightly over a third (38 percent) funded a specific new program for girls or expanded an existing program that seemed successful. About a quarter of the states held either a conference and/or undertook special training on girls needs, and slightly under a quarter formed special committees (such a Florida’s Girls Initiative Committee, Ohio’s Gender Specific Working Group, or the Hawaii Girl’s Project). Finally, only about 10 percent of the states indicated that their committees were involved in the crafting of specific legislation and/or system policy changes. (See Table 2)

Table 2 State Challenge Grant Activities: A National Overview

Activity	Percentage of States Undertaking Activity
Profiling girls in system/needs assessment	95% (20/21)
New Program Initiative	38% (8/21)
Special Conference	28% (6/21)
Specialized Training(s)	28% (6/21)
Formed Girls’ Policy Committee	23% (5/21)
Undertook Legislative on Policy Change	10% (2/21)

**Please note that states can and did undertake more than one activity.*
 Compiled from Chesney-Lind, et. al., 1998

Gender-Specific Risk Factors: A Place to Start

We are left then with insights about program content that can be gleaned from what is known broadly about girl’s development and more specifically about girl’s delinquency. Careful reviews of the risk factors for boys and girls are sensitive to the fact that young people live in a gendered universe. As

an example, the Minnesota Women's Fund contends that the most frequent risk factors for girls and boys differ, and that for girls the list includes: emotional stress, physical and sexual abuse, negative body image, disordered eating, suicide and pregnancy. For boys the list included: alcohol, polydrug use, accidental injury, and delinquency (cited in Adolescent Female Subcommittee 1994). While clearly not all girls at risk will end up in the juvenile justice system, this gendered examination of youth problems could set a standard for examination of delinquency prevention and intervention programs.

Among other needs that girls' programs should specifically address include the following: dealing with the physical and sexual violence in their lives (from parents, boyfriends, pimps, and others), confronting the risk of AIDS, dealing with pregnancy and motherhood, drug and alcohol dependency, facing family problems, employment and housing assistance, managing stress, and developing a sense of efficacy and empowerment. Many of these needs are universal and should be part of programs for all youth (Schwartz and Orlando 1991). However, most of these are particularly important for young women.

There is some encouraging news as girl serving organizations (like the YWCA, Girls Incorporated, etc.) begin to realize their responsibility for girls who are in the juvenile justice system. Recent reviews of promising programs for girls (Schwartz and Orlando 1991; Girls Incorporated 1996) indicate that programs which specifically target the housing and employment needs of youth, while also providing the them with the specific skills they will need to survive on their own, are emerging. These often include a built-in caseworker/service broker, as well as counseling components. Clearly, many girls will require specialized counseling to recover from the ravages of sexual and physical victimization, but the research cautions that approaches that rely simply on the provision of counseling services are not likely to succeed (see Chesney-Lind and Shelden 1998).

Importance of Culturally Specific Girls Programs

Programs must also be scrutinized to assure that they are culturally specific as well as gender specific, since girl's lives are colored by both their culture and their gender (and sometimes triply marginalized by age, gender and race as a result). As increasing numbers of girls of color are drawn into the juvenile justice system (and bootstrapped into correctional settings), while their white counterparts are deinstitutionalized, there is a need for programs to be rooted in specific cultures. Since it is clear that girls of color have different experiences of their gender, as well as different experiences with the dominant institutions in the society (Amaro and Agular 1994; Amaro 1995; Orenstein 1994; LaFromboise and Howard-Pitney 1995; Leadbeater and Way 1996), programs to divert and deinstitutionalize *must* be shaped by the unique developmental issues confronting minority girls, as well as building in the specific cultural resources available in ethnic communities .

Programming as if Gender Mattered: A Case Study

A good example of the synergy between understanding, in detail, the dimensions of girls problems and the crafting evaluations of programs with this information in mind comes from the work of Sibylle Artz and her colleague Ted Riecken (1997, 1998). Their review of the outcomes of thirteen individual anti-violence initiatives in Canadian schools (Artz and Riecken, 1997), shows the importance of focusing on gender *and* the desirability of crafting interventions that are gender specific. Moreover, their research reminds us that both girls and boys have a gender, and that both could benefit from attention to the specific ways that masculinity and femininity work in the lives of

young people. Employing pre- and post-tests of self-reported violence of both student and parent participants as well as school based data on same, the researchers quickly concluded that “one size does not fit all” in violence prevention.

Specifically, the researchers found that “boys are far less likely than girls to participated in student groups that promote violence prevention,” (Artz and Riecken 1997, 297) and that “boys are less likely than girls to adopt the anti-violence messages of their schools’ violence prevention programs” (Artz and Riecken 1997, 296). Girls, even girls with a history of violence, were more likely to see violence as problematic and to change as a result of intervention (particularly interventions based on skills based programs and positive reinforcement). General consciousness raising was found to be ineffective with with both sexes. Finally, males tended to be reached only when men participate in violence prevention efforts and when fathers (not mothers) condemn bullying (Artz and Riecken 1997, 298).

Even though girls were being reached by the messages in the generic curriculum, the researchers noted that anti-violence curricula needed to be expanded to include sexual and domestic abuse since virtually non-cover these issues. Other work by these researchers, based on in-depth interviews as well as self-report data, indicated that violent girls were much more likely than non-violent girls to have histories of abuse and current experiences with abusive boyfriends (Artz 1998). This same work indicated that girls violence often tends to be a mimicking of the male violence in girl’s lives (they often come from homes with dominating and abusive fathers). According to Artz, girls fight with other girls either to excite boys and get their attention, or they fight in order to be seen to be a good as boys (Artz 1998).

Finally, Artz concludes that the prevention of girl’s violence means recognizing that “the two kinds of violence against women, male-to-female and female-to-female have their origins in the same belief systems” (Artz 1998, 204)—a system of sexual inequality that valorizes male violence as agency and has girls growing up “seeing themselves through the eyes of males” (Artz 1998, 204).

Running Away

Given the large numbers of girls in the system for running away from home, and the well documented problems with traditional foster care placements for girls, any successful program must address girl’s needs for safe housing, and, in some instances, legal emancipation. Economic support for these choices is also clearly desirable (and available in some parts of Canada and Australia, as examples) (see Alder 1986), but sadly unlikely given the current hostility in the United States to young women living independently.

Education

At-risk girls have severe educational problems, and significant number may have educational disabilities (Girls Incorporated 1996, Dryfoos 1990, Hugo and Rutherford, 1992; Belnap, 1997). Thus, programming for female adolescents should invariably address academic difficulties. The educational neglect of young women of color, particularly African American girls, must be addressed (Orenstein 1994; Arnold 1995). Likewise, any program that encourages girls to succeed in the traditionally male-dominated subjects of math and science is likely to bolster self-esteem, school performance, and even career prospects (Sadker and Sadker 1994).

Dealing with Trauma

Histories of trauma set the stage for substantial problems with depression, self-image, and attempted suicide. One scholar put it that “no one will demand and obtain intervention for her because in our country it is more often slashed tires, not slashed wrists, that are noticed” (Wells 1994 4). Programming for young women should address, without pathologizing, histories of sexual and physical abuse. Girls problems with substance abuse (which are substantial) (Howell and Davis 1992), should be informed by understanding that often, for girls, poly-drug use is a way of self-medicating.

Peers

Negative peer influence is one of the major contributing factors of engaging in delinquent activity (Girls Incorporated 1996). Most girls join negative peer groups or even gangs so that they feel like they “belong” and are accepted somewhere. Indeed, almost half (44.8%) of girls in the juvenile justice system reported feeling little or no love or acceptance while growing up (American Correctional Association 1990). Consequently, girls, particularly delinquent girls, need the positive influence and support of new peers and adult mentors that will encourage them to break or renegotiate bonds with people who have been harmful influences. Thus, ready access to a broad network of adult mentors and peer counselors sensitive to the girl-specific issues and problems should be made available.

Girls seem to prize connectedness and relationships with other people more than boys (Gilligan 1982). In this respect, a relational approach that emphasizes trust and relationship-building with positive female role models would be highly beneficial. However, trust can only be developed when girls perceive their programs as being “safe” spaces where they do not have to fear experiencing condemnation. This entails creating an atmosphere that allows girls to express their thoughts and emotions freely and appropriately.

Similarly, program staff must be affirmative by acknowledging the worth of each girl despite her attitude or background. Girls’ programs also need to create separate time and space for girls, apart from boys, so that issues related to sexism will not be overshadowed by boys’ more disruptive behavior. In addition, girls’ programs should address the realities of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and ableism on girls’ lives, and work to change established beliefs that prevent girls from recognizing their potential. Similarly, allowing cultural differences to be understood and validated is essential to empowering girls from marginalized backgrounds.

The Importance of Age

Programs for girls should ideally begin before adolescence, by age 9 or 10, and continue through the rest of adolescence; this is consistent with research that suggests that earlier preventive approaches are the most effective (Ms. Foundation for Women 1993) Likewise, programs, particularly those that are issue-specific, need to provide transition and after-care services that support young women in maintaining the progress they have made.

Recreation: Beyond Girls Watching Boys Play Sports

Many at-risk girls may engage in delinquent behavior simply because there is little else to occupy their free time. Unfortunately, all too often these programs end up being “girls watching boys play sports.” Structured recreation that consists of varied activities, including sports, leadership opportunities, programs and projects, arts and crafts, community service, ethnic and culturally-oriented activities, dances, and social events, provides a great way for girls to learn new skills, develop responsibility, increase self-esteem and self-confidence, befriend other girls, and most importantly, have fun. Additionally, time and energy spent on rewarding activities dissuades girls from wanting to engage in delinquent or self-defeating behavior in the first place. Girls already embedded within the juvenile justice system frequently state that had they had opportunities to engage in meaningful, interesting activities, they probably would not have fallen into the system. In the words of one girl at the Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility, having “something to do, like a job or something” could have helped her to be delinquency-free. Likewise, another girl in the facility stated that “if you’re smart and strong enough and keep busy, you can stay out of trouble” (Chesney-Lind, et al. 1998, 45).

Programs should invariably work to empower girls. This entails building on girls innate strengths, skills, and creativity to develop their voices and their abilities to assert themselves. In this respect, girls need to be able to identify positively with themselves and each other. They also need the opportunity to aid in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs that are geared for their benefit. Similarly, programs should continually reevaluate their effectiveness and remain flexible to change.

Quality programming for at risk girls entails a commitment towards positive youth development. To this end, young women, rather than being in need of “fixing”, need to be “empowered” through effective preventive and intervention oriented approaches. This ultimately entails respecting female development processes and celebrating the uniqueness of girls and women.

Concluding Words: Boy’s Can’t Talk Girl Talk

There is no shortage of work to be done to understand how to better serve the young women who find themselves juvenile justice system. What research we do have, both on girls problems and on girls experiences with the juvenile justice system, suggests that gender has long played a role in juvenile justice, whether officially recognized or not.

The challenge that confronts us is whether we can take what we know about girls development, the different ways culture impact gender development, and the ways in which girls problems evolve into female delinquency and craft programmatic responses to same. Clearly, much more research is clearly needed to fully understand all of the above topics, and that research should be used to inform both policy and practice.

What scant research we possess suggests that gender-specific programming may allow us to better serve a population that is generally ignored in a criminal justice system that tends to respond to agitated victims and egregious crimes. Lacking a powerful constituency, we have in the past been left with a pattern of “throwaway services for throwaway girls” (Wells, 1994, 4). We can and should do better than this for tomorrow’s women.

Admittedly, the jury is still out and will be out for some time regarding the necessity and effectiveness of gender specific services, but that girls deserve equitable (not equal) treatment and services is undeniable. Perhaps the best case I've seen for girls programming is made by a poem written by a young woman in a girl's program in the juvenile justice system in Chicago; its also a reminder about the humanity, energy, and talent that girls in our systems can offer the world if we can help develop those undeniable talents and go boldly forward into the world that awaits them.

Boys Can't Talk Girl Talk⁵
Boys can't talk girls talk
because you talk about things
boys shouldn't know
or have no right to know
but maybe they need to know?
or do they?

Boys can't talk girls talk
because women and men are different
but men need to know some things
about women in order to have a
relationship or do they?

Boys can't talk girls talk
because boys would take all of
the attention away from the girls and
would demand it for themselves,
is it their security or our insecurity
no more
what ever it is
boys can't talk girls talk

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Notes

¹United States House of Representatives 1992

²Girls Incorporated 1996, 26.

³ Defined by the FBI as murder, forcible rape, robbery, burglary, aggravated assault, larceny theft, auto theft and arson

⁴In a research project funded by OJJDP, the author and her colleagues solicited information from each state that received challenge grant monies (Chesney-Lind, Koo, Kato and Clark, 1998). The descriptions we received were reviewed and the activities of each state roughly coded for this report (note that state's could undertake to do more than one of these activities). All the full descriptions are available in this report.

⁵Anetra N. 1995. "Girls Talkin'...Poetry." Chicago: Chicago Girls Project (December 19).