

## National Trends in Female Arrests, 1960–1990: Assessment and Recommendations for Research

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Trends in female criminality from 1960 to 1990 are examined. The main focus is UCR arrest statistics but other sources of evidence are also used. Major findings include the following: (1) relative to males, the profile of the female offender has not changed; and (2) the principal change in the female percentage of arrests involves the overall rise in property crime, especially minor thefts and frauds. The effects of broad-based legal and societal trends on female criminality are discussed and an agenda for research on the issue of female crime trends is proposed.

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**KEY WORDS:** female criminality; crime/social change; UCR statistics; employment/crime; gender roles; theory/crime.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The past several decades have witnessed a lively debate in both social science and popular commentary over trends in female criminality. Of particular interest have been two questions:

- (1) Has female crime been changing in recent decades and, if so, in what ways?
- (2) Why have the changes occurred?

The debate has drawn evidence primarily from nationwide arrest statistics from the FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports* (UCR) and has been shaped by the interpretation of these statistics in two works published in the mid-1970s, by Freda Adler (1975) and Rita Simon (1975). Both concluded that changing gender roles and the women's movement have had a significant impact on female crime. Their argument is that as women have gained self-esteem, confidence, and self-sufficiency (especially via paid employment), female

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crime rates have increased and the character of female crime has shifted toward more "masculine" kinds of lawbreaking.<sup>2</sup> In their treatments, Adler accented the growth in violent crimes by women, whereas Simon stressed the rise in white-collar and occupational crimes.

A number of criminologists, including myself, have taken issue with Adler's and Simon's interpretation of the UCR data. In several articles (Steffensmeier, 1978, 1980, 1983; Steffensmeier and Cobb, 1981) published around 1980, I (with colleagues) examined female arrest trends from World War II to the late 1970s. This work gave special attention to the period from the mid-60s to the mid-70s when significant numbers of women in the United States (and throughout the industrialized world) took on new work roles and a new consciousness concerning themselves and their place in society. Supplementing the UCR data with other sources of information on crime and female offending, I drew the following conclusions about female arrest trends.

- (1) Except for substantial increases in the female percentage of arrests for minor property crimes like larceny and fraud, the female share of offending has not undergone significant change (i.e., across most offenses, the female percentage held steady or rose only slightly).
- (2) Women have not shifted toward greater involvement in violent crimes but instead have become more involved (both absolutely and relative to men) in minor property crimes.
- (3) The women arrested for larceny and fraud typically have committed a *non* occupational crime such as shoplifting or writing bad checks.
- (4) Sociological factors other than women's liberation better explain the changes in female arrest patterns.

After reviewing trends in UCR property crimes from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, I wrote,

Whatever changes [in female arrest patterns] have occurred appear due to changing law enforcement practices, market consumption trends, and the worsening economic position of many females in the U.S. rather than changing sex roles or the improved occupational, educational, and economic position of women. (Steffensmeier, 1978, p. 580)

My exegesis of the UCR arrest statistics has been fairly well received among criminologists, particularly on the part of those who do research on

<sup>2</sup>Some commentators have classified Adler's approach as "subjectivist" (where the emphasis is on attitudes and identities) and Simon's as "objectivist" (where the emphasis is on opportunities). I disagree. Some differences in the perspectives of Adler and Simon do exist but their interpretations overlap considerably. There is a considerable emphasis by Adler on the criminogenic effects of women's liberation on female crime opportunities, just as there is much emphasis by Simon on the criminogenic effects on women of changes toward nontraditional attitudes and self-definitions.

female crime (Chesney-Lind, 1986; Daly, 1989; Miller, 1986). Nonetheless, some criminologists continue to believe that female crime has been undergoing significant changes (e.g., Austin, 1982) and that the most powerful explanation for these changes is that of Adler and Simon (Alleman, 1993). Moreover, in a recent update of her 1975 monograph, Simon (with Landis) (1991) reiterates her earlier assessment that the increase in arrests of women for larceny and fraud is due to more women in the workforce and that this is evidence that women are catching up with males in involvement in white-collar and corporate crimes.

The liberation thesis that paid employment and women's emancipation cause increased rates of female crime is long-standing in criminology (dating back to at least the 1870s) and intuitively appealing. It has appeal to contemporary criminologists because it asserts the importance of social variables and downplays biological or physical differences between the sexes. The assumption is that socialization and social participation are the predominant social processes that cause women to behave like men as women take on the roles traditionally held by men. In addition, the emancipation perspective is intuitively appealing because it offers readers an uncomplicated picture of social change and female criminality that is easily understood, remembered, and reported.

But skepticism, even rejection, of the emancipation perspective does not call into question the relevance and importance of social variables for explaining female arrest trends. Nor does it imply that female crime is driven by biology. On the contrary, the view that there are sociological factors other than women's liberation that better account for female arrest trends may substantially improve our ability to develop an accurate explanation of the trends. Adler and Simon offer largely individual-level explanations of the changes in female crime and give greatest weight to more mutable factors; other, more sociological accounts can acknowledge more intractable structural and cultural factors.

This paper updates and extends my earlier research on trends in UCR arrest statistics (e.g., Steffensmeier, 1978, 1980), by examining female arrest rates over the 1960–1990 period. To interpret the UCR statistics, I rely heavily on alternative sources of information that provide both quantitative and qualitative evidence on female criminality, on the status of women in American society, and on changes in crime statistics and criminal opportunities. The sources include (1) self-report, case history, and other research on female crime; and (2) interviews with police, court officials, and female offenders conducted by me over the past two decades. Of particular note are interviews with 120 lower-court judges or magistrates in Pennsylvania during 1990–1992 that included questions about female crime patterns and trends. These magistrates either adjudicate or screen all criminal cases in

Pennsylvania and many of the judges have been in office for over 20 years, so that they are uniquely situated for scrutinizing crime trends.<sup>3</sup>

The paper proceeds as follows. I first review female arrest trends from 1960 to 1990, after which I outline six alternative explanations of the trends. I then connect the explanations to arrest trends for specific offenses where notable increases and decreases in the female percentage of arrests have occurred. I conclude by proposing future topics of research on trends in female crime.

## 2. UCR ARREST STATISTICS, BY GENDER

The *Uniform Crime Reports* are the only continuous source of annual data on sex- and age-specific arrests categorized by offense. I calculated arrest rates on all the UCR offense categories except forcible rape and run-aways/curfew violations. Since few crimes are committed by those either under age 10 or over age 65, the rates are calculated for persons aged 10 through 64.<sup>4</sup> Two principal methods of measuring change are used. One is the *female percentage of arrests* (FP/A), adjusting for the sex composition of the population at large. The other is the *offender-profile percentage*, which is defined as the percentage of all arrests within each sex that are arrests for that particular offense. This part of analysis examines the distribution of offenses committed by females to determine if the profile of the female offender has changed (e.g., toward more violence).

Using UCR arrest data for intersex comparisons over time is risky for two reasons: one involves the issue of *reliability*; the other concerns the *meaning* of the statistics per se. First, there are several factors that have artifactually increased the arrest probabilities of females relative to males over the past few decades. Second, the UCR offense categories are *broad* and are derived from a heterogeneous collection of criminal acts. For example, the offense category of larceny-theft includes shoplifting of a \$10.00 item, theft of a radio from a parked auto, theft of merchandise by an employee, and cargo theft amounting to thousands of dollars. The broad offense category of fraud includes passing of bad checks for small amounts and stock frauds involving large sums of money. Burglary includes both unlawful entry into a neighbor's apartment to steal a television and

<sup>3</sup>The study of lower-court judges in Pennsylvania was funded by the National Science Foundation and had two major purposes: (1) to provide an in-depth analysis of the minor judiciary and (2) to provide a comparative analysis of female and male magistrates who preside over the lower courts. Data were collected in 3-hr semistructured interviews.

<sup>4</sup>The statistical procedures used to calculate the rates and other measures of female-to-male arrest trends are straightforward and are described in detail in several of my publications (e.g., Steffensmeier, 1980; Steffensmeier and Streifel, 1992).

safecracking. Further, arrests are not distinguished in terms of whether the suspect is the sole or major perpetrator. Many females arrested for robbery or burglary act as accomplices to male offenders (Covington, 1985; Steffensmeier and Terry, 1986), and many females arrested for homicide or assault act in response to considerable provocation from male associates (Browne, 1992).

This characteristic of UCR data is aggravated by the tendency of researchers to ignore secondary data sources and localized studies of arrests, court referrals, and so forth, as supplemental evidence to interpret the UCR statistics. As a result, inaccurate conclusions are easily drawn such as the mistaken claim that female arrests for larceny and fraud involve occupational crimes. I return to this crucial point throughout the paper.

### 2.1. Trends in Arrest Rates

UCR statistics on female and male arrest trends are presented in Table I. In columns 1-6, male and female arrest rates per 100,000 population for 1960, 1975, and 1990 are shown. In general, the pattern of change was similar for both sexes, with large increases occurring only for larceny, fraud, driving under the influence, drug violations, and assault and decreases in arrest rates for public drunkenness, sex offenses, vagrancy, suspicion, and gambling. This suggests that similar social and legal forces influence the arrest rates for both sexes, independent of any condition unique to women.

### 2.2. Trends in the Female Percentage of Arrests

The middle columns (7-9) in Table I show the female percentage of arrests (FP/A) for various offenses. Note that an increase in the FP/A will occur if female rates increase more than male rates, if female rates are constant but male rates decline, or if female rates decline less than male rates. Several patterns in Table I are noteworthy.

First, when total arrests across all offenses are considered, the female percentage rose substantially—from 11% in 1960 to 15% in 1975 and to 19% in 1990. (The bulk of that rise, as discussed below, is due to the sharp increase in the numbers of women arrested for minor property crimes like larceny and fraud.)

Second, for the majority of offenses, the female percentage of arrests has inched upward (about 1-2% each interval); examples include arrests for simple assaults and burglary. The increase in the FP/A for burglary since the mid-1970s is due to sharply declining rates among males, as compared to stable or slightly rising burglary rates among females. Also, the FP/A for DUI, after holding steady for two decades, has nearly doubled since the early 1980s. (Note, however, that the base rate for females arrested for

**Table I. Male and Female Arrest Rates/100,000, Female Percentage of Arrests, and Male and Female Arrest Profiles (1960-1990 Uniform Crime Reports)**

Offense	Male rates				Female rates				Female percentage (of arrests)				Offender-profile percentage			
	1960		1990		1960		1990		1960		1990		Males		Females	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)			
<b>Against persons</b>																
Homicide	9	16	16	2	3	2	17	14	11	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1			
Aggravated assault	101	200	317	16	28	50	14	13	13	1	3	2	2			
Weapons	69	137	165	4	11	14	4	8	7	1	2	0.5	0.7			
Simple assault	265	354	662	29	54	129	10	13	15	4	6	4	5			
Major property																
Robbery	65	131	124	4	10	12	5	7	8	1	1	0.5	0.5			
Burglary	274	477	319	9	27	32	3	5	8	4	3	1	1			
Stolen property	21	103	121	2	12	17	8	10	11	0.3	1	0.2	0.5			
Minor property																
Larceny-theft	391	749	859	74	321	402	17	30	30	6	10	9	20			
Fraud	70	114	157	12	59	133	15	34	43	1	2	2	7			
Forgery	44	46	51	8	18	28	16	28	34	0.5	0.5	1	1			
Embezzlement	—	7	8	—	3	5	—	28	37	—	0.2	—	0.1			

Female Arrest Trends, 1960-1990

Malicious mischief	121	128	158	5	9	18	4	7	9	2	1	1
Auto theft	—	187	224	—	16	28	—	8	10	—	2	1
Vandalism	—	15	13	—	2	2	—	11	14	—	0.3	0.1
Arson	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drinking/drugs	2573	1201	624	212	87	71	8	7	9	36	8	4
Public drunkenness	344	971	1193	21	81	176	6	5	11	5	15	3
DUI	183	276	428	28	43	102	13	14	17	3	5	4
Liquor laws	49	523	815	8	79	166	15	13	14	1	7	6
Drug abuse	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sex/sex related	15	18	30	37	45	62	73	73	65	0.2	0.4	3
Prostitution	81	55	78	17	5	7	17	8	8	1	1	2
Sex offenses	749	597	499	115	116	119	13	17	18	11	5	14
Disorderly conduct	265	45	26	23	7	4	8	14	12	4	0.3	3
Vagrancy	222	31	13	28	5	3	11	13	15	3	0.1	3
Suspicion	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Miscellaneous	90	57	51	8	7	12	8	10	16	1	0.5	1
Against family	202	60	14	19	6	2	8	9	15	3	0.2	2
Gambling	871	1139	2109	150	197	430	15	15	15	13	23	19
Other except traffic	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	7070	7850	9211	831	1383	2122	11	15	19	19	20	20

burglary and DUI is small, so that even a doubling of the FP/A is not that large an absolute increase.)

Third, for a number of offenses, the female percentage held steady or declined slightly, including arrests for public drunkenness, drug law violations, aggravated assault, and homicide. The female share of homicide arrests is now about 10% compared to about 17% in 1960.

Fourth, the female percentage of arrests has narrowed considerably for larceny-theft, fraud, and forgery. The female share of all larceny arrests increased from 17% in 1960 to about 30% in 1990, while the female share of fraud and forgery arrests increased from about 15 to 43 and 34%, respectively. Some research suggests that much of the increase in the FP/A for larceny is due to disproportionate numbers of females arrested for shoplifting (Giordano *et al.*, 1981; Klemke, 1992; Silverman *et al.*, 1976; Watson, 1993). The female share of embezzlement arrests also has been rising (from about 28% in 1975 to 37% in 1990), but very few females or males are arrested for embezzling; therefore, arrest rates for embezzlement are of little significance in terms of overall male/female arrest trends. Finally, note that the FP/A for larceny has held steady since about 1975. (I discuss this finding below.)

Because the volume of larceny arrests is sizable, female gains in larceny have contributed to a large increase in the FP/A for serious or index crimes (homicide, aggravated assault, forcible rape, robbery, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and larceny-theft). The FP/A climbed from 10% in 1960 to 22% in 1990. Also, 13% of all female arrests were for index crimes in 1960, compared to 25% in 1990. For males, arrests for index crimes increased more modestly, going from 14% in 1960 to 20% in 1990. Because larceny is not perceived as a "serious" crime (Rossi *et al.*, 1974; Wolfgang *et al.*, 1985), I omitted it from the calculations and found (1) no change in the percentage of all female arrests that were for index crimes (about 5% both in 1960 and in 1990) and (2) a rise in the FP/A for index crimes from 6% in 1960 to 10% in 1990. The remaining increase in the FP/A for index crimes is due to a sharp drop in male burglary rates since the mid-1970s.

### 2.3. Trends in Offender Profiles

Table I also compares the 1960 and the 1990 arrest profiles of male and female offenders (columns 10–13). The profile represents the *percentage of all arrests within each sex* that are arrests for that particular offense. The homicide figures for 1990 of 0.2 for men and 0.1 for women indicate that only 0.2% of all male arrests were for homicide, and only 0.1% of all female arrests were for homicide.



The similarities between the male and the female profiles and their arrest trends are considerable. For both males and females, the three most common arrest categories in 1990 are DUI, larceny-theft, and “other except traffic”—a residual category that includes mostly criminal mischief, public disorder, local ordinance violations, and assorted minor crimes. Together, these three offenses account for 48% of all male arrests and 49% of all female arrests. (But note that 20 and 9% of all female arrests are for larceny and DUI, respectively, compared to 10 and 15% among males.) Arrests for murder, arson, and embezzlement are relatively rare for males and females alike, whereas liquor law violations (mostly underage drinking), simple assault, and disorderly conduct account for a somewhat larger proportion of arrests for both sexes.

The most important gender differences in arrest profiles involve the relatively greater involvement of females in minor property crimes such as larceny and fraud (about 28% of all female arrests, compared to 12% of male arrests) and in prostitution, and the relatively greater involvement of males in crimes against persons and major property crimes (17% of all male arrests versus 11% of all female arrests). These patterns are similar to those found in other comparisons of gender differences in crime (see review by Steffensmeier and Allan, 1990).

The distribution of offenses for which both men and women are arrested has shifted a fair amount over the past 30 years, but the patterns of shifts for males and females are comparable. Of all persons arrested in 1990 versus 1960, a larger share of *both* male and female arrests was for DUI, larceny, and drug law violations, while a smaller share was for public drunkenness and disorderly conduct. I also rank-ordered by size the male and female rates and found parallel shifts in rank ordering except that the rank ordering for fraud jumped much more among female than male arrestees, whereas the rank ordering for prostitution and vagrancy dropped more among female arrestees. Rank-order correlations performed on the 1960 and 1990 ranking of offenses (as reflected in the profile-percentages) confirm that female arrest patterns have undergone moderate change as have male patterns ( $\rho = 0.57$  and  $0.60$ , respectively). There has been some convergence between the sexes in the kinds of crimes for which they are arrested: the male-to-female rank-order correlation was  $0.76$  in 1960 and  $0.88$  in 1990. However, when the sex-related offenses (e.g., vagrancy) are removed, the male-to-female rank-order correlation was  $0.89$  in 1960 and  $0.88$  in 1990. Relative to men, therefore, the profile of the female offender has not changed.

#### 2.4. Juvenile vs. Adult Trends in the Female Percentage of Arrests

It is plausible that shifting gender-role ideologies and other structural changes have had more of an effect on younger women than older women,

Table II. Female Percentage of Arrests Among Youth and Adult Populations (1960, 1975, 1990)

	Youth				Adult			
	1960	1975	1990	% change	1960	1975	1990	% change
<b>Against persons</b>								
Homicide	9.7	10.6	6.6	-3.1	14.8	15.4	13.4	-1.4
Aggrav. assault	10.3	14.3	13.9	3.6	14.9	12.1	13.1	-1.8
Weapons	3.4	6.7	6.2	2.8	6.5	8.2	8.4	1.9
Simple assaults	12.8	18.7	21.4	8.6	9.1	11.5	13.9	4.8
<b>Major property</b>								
Robbery	4.7	7.1	7.8	3.1	4.9	7.0	8.9	4.0
Burglary	3.0	5.4	7.8	4.8	3.4	5.9	9.6	6.2
Stolen property	7.3	9.4	9.5	2.2	9.0	11.4	13.2	4.2
<b>Minor property</b>								
Larceny	14.2	29.1	27.7	13.5	19.0	33.5	32.2	13.2
Fraud	22.6	32.6	39.8	17.2	14.6	34.4	45.7	31.1
Forgery	23.6	32.0	32.7	9.1	14.4	27.5	33.7	19.3
Embezzlement	—	24.3	45.7	(21.4)	—	40.2	38.4	(-1.8)
<b>Malicious mischief</b>								
Auto theft	3.8	7.5	10.0	(6.2)	3.5	6.4	10.7	7.2
Vandalism	—	7.5	9.3	(1.8)	—	10.0	17.4	(7.4)
Arson	—	9.3	10.2	(0.9)	—	14.5	14.6	(0.1)
<b>Drinking/drugs</b>								
Public drunkenness	8.2	9.9	11.4	3.2	7.7	6.5	9.4	1.7
DUI	3.4	6.9	12.7	9.3	5.8	7.8	12.2	6.4
Liquor laws	10.2	16.6	23.3	13.1	16.6	10.2	14.0	-2.6
Drug abuse	13.6	15.0	12.0	-1.6	14.7	12.6	17.0	2.3
<b>Sex/sex related</b>								
Prostitution	76.4	83.2	70.6	-5.8	71.0	69.1	68.4	-2.6
Sex offenses	25.3	11.1	7.6	-17.7	14.2	6.8	7.5	-6.7
Disorderly conduct	13.1	14.7	18.6	5.5	13.5	17.9	18.4	4.9
Vagrancy	12.6	18.8	16.3	3.7	7.4	12.8	12.9	5.5
Suspicion	12.2	15.2	18.1	5.9	10.9	13.0	14.9	4.0
<b>Miscellaneous</b>								
Against family	21.2	23.1	26.7	5.5	7.4	7.9	16.6	9.2
Gambling	5.0	4.0	7.5	2.5	8.5	8.9	15.6	7.1
Other except traffic	20.6	18.3	18.5	-2.1	11.0	13.5	15.6	4.6
<b>Total</b>	13.2	19.4	20.2	7.0	9.9	13.3	17.3	7.4

so that the rise in offending by young women may be especially acute (see the review by Steffensmeier and Streifel, 1992). To examine this issue, data on the female percentage of arrests for youth (ages 10-17) and adults (ages 18-64) for the years 1960, 1975, and 1990 are presented in Table II. The absolute change in the female percentage over the 1960-1990 period also is shown. In general, the FP/A's across the three decades are quite similar for youths and adults. For example, the FP/A for larceny in 1990 is 27.7 for youth and 32.2 for adults, and FP/A's change by 5 percentage points from 1960 to 1990 for both juveniles and adults. The major difference in arrest patterns between the two age groups occurs for fraud and forgery, where the increase in the female percentage of arrests is much greater among adults than juveniles. The change among adults is 31 percentage points for fraud and 19 percentage points for forgery, compared to changes of 17 percentage

points for fraud and 9 percentage points for forgery among youth. These differences reflect expanding opportunities for credit-based currency crimes (e.g., writing bad checks, defrauding an innkeeper, forging credit cards, nonpayment of services) that intertwine more with adult than juvenile lives (see discussion below).

## 2.5. Other Evidence on Female Crime Trends

Evidence from other sources shows more stability than change in female crime relative to male crime over the past several decades. Data from the National Crime Survey on victim's perception of the offender's sex show that from 1973 to 1990, sex differences held stable for robbery (female share was 7% in 1973 and 1990) and for assault (about 14% in both years). The National Youth Survey, generally recognized as the best of the self-report delinquency studies, provides information on delinquency trends for male and female adolescents from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. The survey finds increases in some delinquent behaviors (e.g., alcohol and drug use) among both male and female adolescents and decreases in others (e.g., theft and assault) but stable gender differences in delinquency. After reviewing the data, Delbert Elliott and associates conclude that during this time frame, the self-report data "show no significant decline in the [male-to-female] sex ratios on eight specific offenses" (Elliott *et al.*, 1987). In addition, there is little evidence that female gang activity has changed significantly (see Miller, 1973; Jankowski, 1991; but see Curry, 1993).

Statistics on males and females incarcerated in state and federal prisons provide additional information on female crime trends. From roughly the mid-1920s to the present, the female percentage of the total prison population varied between 3 and 6% (Greenfeld, 1992). The female percentage was about 5% in the 1920s, about 3% in the 1960s, and is about 6% today. As with male incarceration rates, female rates rose very sharply—more than doubling—during the 1980s. Most women in prison today were convicted of homicide or assault (usually against spouse, lover, or child) and for property crimes that are often drug related. During the 1980s, a larger percentage of female new court commitments than of male new court commitments entered prison for drug offenses. Also, a higher percentage of female prison inmates than male inmates was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their current offense (Greenfeld and Minor-Harper, 1991).

Finally, female involvement in professional and organized crime has not increased and continues to lag far behind male involvement. Women continue to be hugely underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated

associations that engage in safecracking, fencing operations, gambling operations, and racketeering. In 1991 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania released its *1990 Report* on organized crime and racketeering activities in the state during the 1980s period (Pennsylvania Crime Commission, 1991). That report identified only a handful of women who were major players in large-scale gambling and racketeering, and their involvement was a direct spinoff of association with a male figure (i.e., the woman was a daughter, spouse, or sister). The *1990 Report* also noted that the extent and character of women's involvement in the 1980s were comparable to their involvement during the 1970s.

Of anecdotal pertinence are the responses of 120 lower-court judges (70 male judges and 50 female judges) in Pennsylvania who, as part of a larger survey of the minor judiciary in the state, were asked to assess trends in female crime. Some judges had been in office more than 25 years. The judges uniformly responded that crime remains essentially a male phenomenon. This response from a female magistrate was typical: "Most of my caseload is male, very much so. The only real female crime that stands out in my mind is retail theft and harassment. And checks. I am seeing more women for that because there's a big shopping mall in my district."

### **3. EXPLAINING FEMALE ARREST TRENDS**

There are at least six plausible explanations of these trends and patterns in female arrests that I group under the following headings: law and the organizational management of crime, gender equality, economic adversity of females, expanded opportunities for female-type crimes, shifts in the underworld, and trends in drug dependency. Each should be viewed as a series of hypotheses in need of empirical testing.

#### **3.1. Organizational Management of Crime: Enhanced "Visibility" of Female Offending**

The arrest rate, similar to any official measure of crime, is a function of behaviors defined as criminal and control measures established to deal with them. Some of the increase in the female percentage of arrests may reflect changes in laws, in policing, or in record keeping that have raised female arrest rates relative to male rates in recent decades. That bureaucratization and more formal policing tend to increase official ratios of female-to-male criminality is consistent with alternative sources of data on female crime.

For example, computerization and improved record keeping in police departments increased the accuracy in recording suspect's sex. This has reduced the level of hidden female crime since an "unknown" is tabulated as a male arrestee in published tables. This refinement in record keeping probably had its greatest impact on female arrest trends during the 1960s (Steffensmeier, 1980). More bureaucratization in policing has also introduced more universalistic standards of decision-making, thus reducing the effects of gender on probability of arrest (Visher, 1983). Additionally, the expanded use of informants has increased the utility of female suspects who are charged with offenses as a pressure point for gaining incriminating evidence against male offenders with whom they are associated (Steffensmeier and Terry, 1986; Pennsylvania Crime Commission, 1991). Finally, changes in laws and enforcement toward targeting less serious forms of lawbreaking (e.g., lowering the blood alcohol content in arrests for DUI) has increased the risk of arrest for female offenders. The ability of the authorities to dip more deeply into the pool of offenders will increase the female share of arrests, because females tend to be involved disproportionately in the less serious forms of lawbreaking even within a specific offense category.

The changes in the organizational management of crime suggest that changes in the FP/A are, to some extent, artifactual. The next series of explanations assumes that at least some, if not most, of the changes in the FP/A are due to actual changes in the behaviors of female offenders.

### 3.2. Female Emancipation

Both the popular press and some social scientists have linked recent trends in arrests to female emancipation and the improved status of women (Simon and Landis, 1991). Less traditional gender-role attitudes and greater opportunities in the economic sphere, especially female advances in the paid workforce, are believed to have resulted in higher levels of female crime.

Consistent with this perspective are changes in arrests for some offenses that appear to have clear connections to changes in women's roles and activities. For example, the rise in the female percentage of arrests for DUI can be attributed, in part, both to women's greater participation in the public sphere (e.g., going to college, working, traveling) and to more women driving automobiles. However, it is debatable whether the expanding use of the automobile by women is better explained as a fundamental role change or as a society-wide diffusion of a technological necessity (i.e., a required mode of transportation, as discussed below). The latter interpretation suggests a different type of explanation from the "female emancipation" account. Moreover, many writers argue that it is theoretically unwarranted to assume

that the effect of equalization of gender roles is necessarily criminogenic, since greater female social participation may reduce stress, increase self-esteem, and in other ways positively affect what are often described in the criminological literature as the causes of crime (see review by Steffensmeier and Allan, 1990).

The major predicament with the liberation thesis, however, is that it is inconsistent with much of what is known about both female crime and contemporary gender roles. Five types of evidence support this claim. First, the changes in the female percentage of arrests were as great or greater prior to the women's movement (begins around 1970) as in subsequent years when female labor force participation and other "status of women" indicators accelerated (Bianci and Spain, 1986). Second, the female percentage of arrests is comparable across age groups both for the entire period (1960–1990) and for individual decades (e.g., 1960–1970). This contradicts the expectation that trends in female employment and women's status should have a greater impact on the criminality of young adult and middle-aged women than adolescent and elderly women (Steffensmeier and Streifel, 1992). Third, the female percentage of embezzlement arrests actually declined among adults, which conflicts with Simon's version of the emancipation thesis. Fourth, female offenders typically bear little resemblance to the "liberated female crook" described by some commentators. Instead, these offenders typically are unemployed women or women working at low-paying jobs or are minority women drawn from backgrounds of profound poverty (Chesney-Lind, 1986; Steffensmeier and Allan, 1990; Wolfe, Cullen and Cullen 1984). Finally, recent time-series and cross-sectional analyses indicate that higher female-to-male arrest levels are linked to structural conditions in which women face adverse rather than favorable economic circumstances (Streifel, 1989; Steffensmeier and Streifel, 1992).

### **3.3. Increased Economic Adversity of Women**

One of the better predictors of involvement in criminal activity is economic hardship (Allan and Steffensmeier, 1989; Wolfe, Cullen and Cullen, 1984). A larger segment of the female population faces greater economic insecurity today than 30 years ago, even though some women have become more emancipated and have moved into formerly male professions. Rising rates of divorce, illegitimacy, and female-headed households, coupled with continued segregation of women in low-paying occupations, have aggravated the economic pressures on women and have left them more responsible for child care than they were two or three decades ago (Dabelko and Sheak, 1992; Kitson and Morgan 1990). Growing economic adversity increases the pressures to commit consumer-based crimes such as shoplifting, check fraud, theft of services, and welfare fraud.

The economic adversity thesis is consistent with studies of the characteristics of female offenders (noted above) and with recent cross-sectional and time-series research on structural correlates of the female percentage of property-crime arrests (Streifel, 1989; Steffensmeier and Streifel, 1992). These studies show that the higher female-to-male arrest levels are linked to social conditions in which women face adverse rather than favorable economic circumstances such as greater occupational segregation, more female-headed households, higher rates of illegitimacy, and higher rates of female unemployment. The adversity thesis also predicts female arrest gains in all the property crimes, which in fact has occurred.

### 3.4. Expanded Opportunities for Female-Type Crimes

Because female offenders (similar to male offenders) gravitate toward activities that are easily available and within their skills, the level and character of female crime in a given society will be strongly affected by the availability of crime opportunities that are suited to female interests and abilities. Changes in American society since World War II have created more opportunities for fraud and dishonesty and related offenses that “*everywoman*” (or everyman) can commit (Steffensmeier, 1980; Weisburd *et al.*, 1991). They do not require the physical skills and dexterity of many forms of street crime, or the skills of professional con artists. These crimes typically require little more than “the ability to read, write, and fill out forms, along with some minimum level of presentation of a respectable self” (Weisburd *et al.*, 1991, p. 182). Moreover, while collusion may often be present, many of these crimes can be committed on one’s own.

Changing patterns of productive activity in at least five areas have created opportunities for the commission of new forms of crime (e.g., minor thefts and frauds) that favor female involvement: (1) production, merchandising, and marketing of goods; (2) the credit economy; (3) a welfare state and its programs; (4) the importance of credentials for job placement and social status; and (5) consumerism and the message of consumption.<sup>5</sup>

Important conditions leading to more opportunities for theft and fraud are the credit economy and the increase in shopping malls, self-service marketing, and small, portable products. Lines of credit and credit cards produce paper frauds such as credit fraud, bad checks, coupon fraud, and fraudulent

<sup>5</sup>In presenting these changes I borrow heavily from my earlier work (Steffensmeier, 1980, 1983) and from Weisburd *et al.* (1991). While my focus has been on the disproportionate increase in opportunities for female-type crimes, their emphasis is on the increase in crime opportunities for middle-class persons.

theft of services. The latter typically involves the failure to make payment for rental property (e.g., videocassettes) or for contracted services like rent, water, heat, cable TV, and telephone. The growth in shopping malls and portable products enhances the opportunities (and incentives) for shoplifting, theft from parked automobiles, and the like.

The conditions for the commission of fraud and theft are also created by various programs of the welfare state. Student loans, Social Security, Medicaid, ADC, HUD, and other welfare programs depend on written materials, and all involve the potential for fraudulent applications. There also is much potential for theft of government checks from mailboxes, delivery trucks, and the like. At the same time, society's increasing reliance on formal credentials creates opportunities to falsify identification in the preparation of application forms, or to fake the data. The emphasis on grades, graduation, awards, job experience, and the like elicits "pressures to inflate the credentials or to make them up when they do not exist" (Weisburd *et al.*, 1991, p. 183).

These changes are reinforced by the media's message of consumption that encourages excessive spending and buying on credit. The message to "consume" goods encourages theft (including shoplifting) and chiseling to stretch the paycheck or upgrade one's car, home, appearance, or life-style. The rise in female property, in particular, can be seen as a by-product of opportunities created by the evolution of productive activity (e.g., transportation, merchandising, currency) rather than to changes in female motivation or in their social and economic position. Although these changes have expanded the crime opportunities for both sexes, on balance the opportunities for traditional types of female crime have been expanding at a faster pace than have those for traditional male crimes. Analogously, American society has become more "target rich" for property crimes that favor middle-class involvement (Weisburd *et al.*, 1991).

### 3.5. Changes in the Criminal Underworld

The criminal underworld has undergone some changes in recent decades that, on balance, appear to have contributed to higher rates of female offending. The changes include (1) the emergence of drug trafficking as the dominant criminal market, (2) a decline in some forms of professional crime, (3) shifts in ethnic composition, and (4) an increase in "instrumental" forms of violence (this would increase male violence).

Subtle shifts in the underworld may raise or dampen the prospects for female involvement. Given the male dominance of the underworld and the sexism characterizing it, female crime opportunities are dependent partly on whether male criminals find females to be useful. For example, in recent years women have become useful for successful drug trafficking because they



are more likely to have clean records, create less suspicion, and can conceal drugs more easily. At the same time, the underworld appears to be younger, more amateurish, and less professional today. My research suggests that professional crime groups are less likely to admit women into their groups or to allow them to play fairly active roles (Steffensmeier, 1983; Steffensmeier and Terry, 1986; Pennsylvania Crime Commission, 1991). Also, some forms of professional crime which historically involved a heavy preponderance of male offenders have declined (e.g., safecracking). Would-be recruits into these traditionally male crimes are being drawn instead into other forms of theft (e.g., theft from parked motor vehicles) or drug trafficking (Shover, 1991; Steffensmeier, 1986).

Meanwhile, demographic shifts in the large urban areas of America where the bulk of reported crime occurs have affected both underworld crime and female lawbreaking. In particular, there has been an increase in Hispanic and Black populations that tend to have comparatively high levels of female-to-male offending, especially in drug trafficking (Steffensmeier and Allan, 1988; Pennsylvania Crime Commission, 1991; Anglin *et al.*, 1987). If, for example, there is somewhat greater participation of females in youth gangs today, that may reflect the ethnic shift that is occurring in many of America's large cities.

The other major change in the underworld involves the greater use of violence for instrumental or materialistic ends. An increasing proportion of all homicides is perpetrated for instrumental rather than expressive purposes. Males disproportionately commit instrumental-type killings, which helps to explain the decline in the FP/A for homicide.

### 3.6. Drug Dependency/Addiction

Rising levels of illicit drug use by females over the past two or three decades may also help account for female crime trends. Drug addiction amplifies income-generating crimes of both sexes, but more so for females than males (Anglin *et al.*, 1987; Goshko and Wohl, 1979; Inciardi *et al.*, 1993). Because females face greater constraints against crime (e.g., it is more stigmatizing), they may need greater motivational pressures before they will commit a crime. Female involvement in burglary and robbery, in particular, typically occurs after addiction and is likely to be abandoned when drug use ceases (Anglin *et al.*, 1987). Drug use is also more likely to initiate females into the underworld and criminal subcultures and to connect them to drug-dependent males who use them as crime accomplices or exploit them as "old ladies" to support their addiction (Covington, 1985; Miller, 1986; Steffensmeier and Terry, 1986). In these and other ways, the rise in drug dependency would have a greater impact on female criminality, even though female drug arrests have not outpaced male arrests since 1960.

#### 4. APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK TO SELECT CRIMES

The preceding discussion can provide an account for offenses like homicide, where the female share of arrests has declined, and for offenses like larceny and DUI, where notable increases in the female share of arrests have occurred. My treatment of trends in several crime categories is somewhat speculative and is intended to raise issues for future research.

##### 4.1. Homicide

The female percentage of homicide arrests decreased steadily over the past three decades, from 17% in 1960 to 10% in 1990. This downward trend is due largely to a proportionate increase in felony-murders and stranger killings (from about 7% of all homicides in 1960 to about 20% in 1990). Males are overwhelmingly the offenders in instrumental, felony-related killings (e.g., a contract murder or a homicide committed while carrying out a robbery or a drug deal), whereas homicides involving female perpetrators almost always occur during noncriminal activity (e.g., domestic dispute). The increase in instrumental murders appears to be due to several factors: the growth in convenience stores and similar establishments which are more suitable targets for robbery, the escalating availability of more lethal firearms, the growth in violent youth gangs, and the strong consumer appetite for hard drugs that has fostered a violent drug trade (especially in large urban areas).

Another factor that may contribute to the decline in the FP/A for homicide, particularly during the 1980s, has been the growth of shelters and other services for abused women. This growth may have enabled abused women to escape from abusive males, instead of killing them. Browne (1992) reports a 20% decrease in the number of women killing male partners over the 1976–1987 period, about the time domestic violence legislation and extra-legal resources for abused women were coming into place. [Over half of the victims of female homicides are male partners (e.g., spouses, lovers).] The presence of avenues for escape or protection for women threatened by male partners may have averted at least a portion of those homicides that occur in desperation or self-defense. Browne reports that this downward trend in partner homicides by women was not matched, however, by a similar trend in partner homicides by men.

##### 4.2. Burglary

The female percentage of burglary arrests has inched upward, especially during the 1980s. The major force pushing up the female percentage has

been a fairly steep drop in the male burglary rate since the mid-1970s. The drop in the male rate reflects a paper decrease brought on by a change in reporting procedures, together with a real decrease in male burglary rates due to shifts in the underworld away from burglary toward drug dealing as a more attractive money-making option (Shover, 1991; Steffensmeier, 1986).

The paper decrease in burglary has occurred because, contrary to instructions from the Uniform Crime Reporting Program, many police departments categorize "theft from a motor vehicle" (e.g., breaking into a parked automobile and stealing a CD player) as a burglary rather than a larceny-theft. In response to UCR pressures, the trend today is for individual police departments to classify a theft from a motor vehicle as a larceny-theft. This change has also pushed up male arrest rates for larceny-theft rates since the mid-1970s (see below).

At the same time, other factors have produced stable female burglary rates. These include the growth in burglary targets that are more suitable for female involvement (e.g., increase in houses or apartments that are unoccupied during the daytime); the increase in drug-related burglaries (and robberies) that involve women as solo perpetrators or women as accomplices of male offenders; the expanding role of the informant system within law enforcement that leads to arrests of females for testimony against male offenders; and a trend toward younger, more reckless criminals who appear more willing than their older and more professional counterparts to admit women into their groups or to exploit them for criminal purposes. (Some of these factors also have contributed to rising arrest rates of females in other property crimes.)

For example, the growth in suburban housing and the greater numbers of women at work have exposed households to greater risk because family members are away or because there are fewer intimate neighbors to look after property while residents are away from home. When women burglarize, they prefer daytime crimes in unoccupied houses or apartments. One female ex-burglar told me:

The women I met in prison who were involved in burglary did it because they were dopers, or did it for a boyfriend who wanted them to scout a place, or both. My involvement came from selling real estate. A couple of the homes I was showing left money laying around. I was very short of money at the time. I had the keys, so I went back later. Did it twice and got caught. It amounted to \$844 in all. But the papers blew it all out of proportion, called me the "real estate lady-burglar," like I was some kind of new feminist freak.

#### 4.3. Driving Under the Influence

A combination of factors helps to explain the rise in the female percentage of arrests for DUI, from 5% in 1975 to 11% in 1990. First, DUI statutes

now have a less demanding criterion of intoxication that requires a smaller amount of alcohol consumption or blood-alcohol content. In addition, DUI enforcement practices have toughened. Both factors have contributed to arrests of less intoxicated violators, particularly women drivers. Second, the proportion of drivers who are female has increased. This reflects the growing reliance on the automobile in modern American society, especially among women as they carry out their work roles, fulfill their family responsibilities, and pursue their leisure activities. Third, women have greater freedom of movement and experience greater acceptance of their drinking in public places. Fourth, there is a larger pool of single, separated, or divorced females, a group that is at comparatively greater risk for driving under the influence and at night when enforcement accelerates and most arrests are made (McCormack, 1985; Wells-Parker *et al.*, 1991; Shore *et al.*, 1988). Single or divorced women are more likely than married women to drink at bars, private clubs, and other social gatherings (Wells-Parker *et al.*, 1991).

The significance of these factors for trends in female DUI arrests is reflected in responses drawn from recent interviews of lower-court magistrates in Pennsylvania. This judge's comment is typical:

DUI cases are still mainly male but we are seeing more women. The reasons are not that complex, really. There are more women who drive nowadays and the law's a lot stricter. You can get hammered [arrested] for just a couple of drinks now. The women are out to socialize, have a drink with some lady friends or to meet guys, at a bar or private club. A lot of these gals are single or divorced, in their twenties and thirties. They're out for a good time—have a couple of drinks, dance, party a little, and head for home. Oops! The cops pull them over.

#### 4.4. Larceny-Theft

Since 1960, females have made sizable gains in arrests for larceny, fraud, and forgery. (The FP/A rose from about 15% in 1960 to about 35% in 1990.) Most arrests of women in these offense categories are for shoplifting, passing bad checks, credit card fraud, theft of services, welfare fraud, and small con games (Giordano *et al.*, 1981; Klemke, 1992; Silverman *et al.*, 1976; Steffensmeier, 1980; Watson, 1993). These kinds of lawbreaking represent extensions of female domestic and consumer role activities, rather than new role patterns. Males also engage in such crimes and in larger numbers, but the proportion of male crime accounted for by these crimes is lower than for females (Klemke, 1992; Lindquist, 1988). Recent changes in currency and consumerism have affected the theft/fraud opportunities for both sexes, but more for females than males. Simultaneously, the greater economic adversity facing large subgroups of women today may have heightened their incentive and risk-taking aptitude for theft and fraud.

Of particular interest here is that the female percentage of arrests for larceny almost doubled between 1960 and 1975 (increasing from 17 to 30%) but has held steady since. (In contrast, the rise in the FP/A for fraud and forgery is persistently upward during the 1980s.) Several interrelated factors help to explain this rapid rise and subsequent plateau in the FP/A for larceny. First, increased opportunities for shoplifting—a female-type crime—occurred across the three decades but especially in the 1960s, when the rapid growth in shopping malls, self-service marketing, and small, portable products outpaced protection-against-theft measures. Second, that trend has been countered in recent years by increased opportunities for larcenies such as bicycle theft and theft from parked automobiles that overwhelmingly are committed by male offenders. Third, fluctuations both in the law and in enforcement practices have affected arrest trends for larceny.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the enforcement trend was toward a stricter, more formal handling of shoplifters (which would lead to more arrests of females). In recent years, stores have become less willing to prosecute shoplifters (leading to proportionately fewer larceny arrests of females). In fact, many states now have “civil recovery” laws that allow store officials to impose a civil penalty (e.g., return the merchandise and pay a \$50 recovery fee) on apprehended shoplifters instead of arresting or initiating formal charges against them (Klemke, 1992). In some localities there are even non-arrest alternatives whereby first-time shoplifters are allowed to participate in shoplifting prevention programs in place of a formal arrest. At the same time, the reclassification of a theft from a motor vehicle to a larceny (rather than a burglary) has increased male larceny arrests. Thus, countervailing trends in opportunities and enforcement practices brought about a rise in female larceny arrests in the 1960s but have dampened their arrest gains in the 1980s.

#### **4.5. The Distorted Link Between Female Employment and Theft/Fraud Arrests**

In her interpretation of UCR arrest trends, Simon (1975, 1991) argues that an increase in more women in the paid workplace has resulted in more female employee theft and white-collar crime and, consequently, more arrests of women for larceny and fraud. [See Darrow (1922) for an earlier statement of this view.] It is reasonable to assume that at least some proportion of the increasing number of working women has capitalized on their opportunities for work-related thefts and frauds, so that employee theft and white-collar crime involving women are greater today than a decade or two ago. There is, in this regard, considerable similarity between the current situation and

that of the late 19th century, when female involvement in domestic theft (also an occupational crime) was unusually high as a result of work roles then available to women.

But because the crime categories of larceny and fraud are poor indicators of white-collar offenses, it is a mistake to conclude that recent trends in female employment have had much of an impact on female arrest trends. The typical arrestee in these offense categories has committed a nonoccupational crime such as shoplifting or passing bad checks. Jennifer Watson and I recently examined the case files of all arrests for minor property crimes in an SMSA county in central Pennsylvania for 3 randomly selected months in each of the years, 1989 and 1990 (Watson, 1993). In both years there were about 600 minor property crime arrests (i.e., for larceny, fraud, forgery, and embezzlement). We did not find a single arrest for an occupational crime in the 1989 data, and only four arrests for an occupational crime in 1990. The latter involved a male and a female arrested for misappropriation of funds by a local government official, a female arrested for pilfering clothes from a local department store, and a male arrested for stealing carpentry tools from his employer. An earlier study conducted in 1981 at the same site had uncovered only 4 cases of employee theft or fraud, of a total of 311 arrests. Two of these four arrests involved domestic theft by women who were self-employed as cleaning ladies. Further, we also questioned a number of police officials responsible for recordkeeping in other localities of Pennsylvania; all agreed that arrests for occupational or employee-type crimes are infrequent. As one police official noted,

My acquaintances in business are always complaining to me about their employees stealing from them. I tell them, why don't you report it, call the police. They say [that] they prefer to fire them and leave it at that. Less hassle I guess.

Arrests for employee theft or other occupational crimes, therefore, are rare events. There may be more employee theft by women today than in the past but that increase cannot be extrapolated from or determined by UCR arrest statistics. Moreover, UCR data on embezzlement arrests are not of much value for understanding occupational crime because embezzlement makes an insignificant contribution to overall occupational crime patterns. Embezzlement statistics also comprise some amount of nonoccupational embezzlements (e.g., the club treasurer who embezzles). In addition, according to Table II, the increase in the female percentage of arrests for embezzlement is due entirely to more arrests of juvenile females. The female percentage of embezzlement arrests has actually declined among adult

women (ages 18+), who have been most affected by recent employment trends.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. SUMMARY

Three general conclusions can be drawn about recent trends in female arrests. First, the distribution of offenses for which both males and females are arrested has changed, but relative to males, the profile of the female offender has not changed. Second, females made arrest gains (mostly small gains) in many UCR offense categories but the most significant change in the female percentage of arrests involves the overall rise in property crime, especially minor thefts and frauds. Third, female-to-male involvement in serious or violent crime has held steady since 1960 (FP/A dropped for homicide, was constant for aggravated assault, and increased slightly for robbery). Evidence from other sources on crime trends also shows more stability than change in female crime relative to male crime over the past several decades.

These patterns parallel those described in earlier analyses that covered the period of the 1960s and 1970s (Steffensmeier, 1980), with two exceptions. After holding steady during the 1960s and 1970, the female percentage of DUI arrests rose sharply during the late 1980s. Second, the female share of burglary arrests rose more rapidly in the 1980s than in prior decades. As holds for trends in the FP/A for other crimes, the increase in the FP/A for burglary can be attributed to the interplay of several factors. These include a decline in male burglary (due to changes in reporting procedures and to males selecting drug trafficking as an alternative criminal activity), more opportunities for female "kinds" of burglary, greater police targeting of

<sup>6</sup>There also are a number of internal inconsistencies in Simon's argument. First, according to Simon and Landis (1991, p. 11), "The economic marginalization thesis would argue that as women move into more responsible positions, their propensities to commit property offenses will decline. The data show that the reverse has occurred. There is a positive relationship between female upward occupational mobility and higher female property crime, especially white-collar, arrest rates." Leaving aside the "ecological fallacy" problem, Simon and Landis miss the point of the economic marginalization thesis—that, while occupational mobility has been achieved by some women, another segment of the female population has encountered economic marginalization. Simultaneous trends describe women's economic status, one of upward mobility and the other of greater economic adversity. Second, the Simon/Landis view of female upward mobility predicts increases in female arrests for larceny and fraud only, but the female percentage also rose for burglary and robbery. The latter increases are consistent with the economic marginalization thesis, since it predicts increases in all the property crimes (see Steffensmeier and Streifel, 1992). Third, female arrest gains for larceny peaked in the mid-1970s and have held steady since, despite continued employment gains by females in the 1980s.

female "co-offenders" to inform on male offenders, declining professionalism within the ranks of burglary and the underworld more generally, and increased drug dependency among women.

Gender differences in quantity and quality of crime continue to be consistent with traditional gender-role expectations, behaviors, and opportunities. Indeed, substantial changes in the illegitimate activities of women would be surprising. Attitudes have shifted toward a greater acceptance of women in the workforce, the combining of career and family, and the gender-role system favors more individual latitude. But there has been little change in many aspects of gender roles: in gender-typing in children's play activities and play groups (Fagot and Leinbach, 1983; Stoneman *et al.*, 1984; Thorne, 1992), in gender differences in conversational styles (Tannen, 1991; Weaner-Davis, 1992), in the kinds of personality characteristics that both men and women associate with each gender (Maccoby, 1985; Bergen and Williams, 1991), in the expectation that women will be the gatekeepers of male sexuality (Rubin, 1983), in the importance placed on physical attractiveness of women and their pressures to conform to an ideal of beauty and/or "femininity" (Mazur, 1986), and in female responsibilities for child-rearing and nurturing activities such as caring for the sick and the elderly (Himes, 1992).

Female economic participation per se does not necessarily lead to greater female criminality, just as improved economic opportunities and higher educational achievement do not lead to greater male criminality. This does not mean that changes in the family and economy have not had an impact on female patterns of offending. As noted earlier, recent changes in the household economy and family have resulted in greater participation of women in economic production and the public sphere. This greater participation provides more opportunities for certain kinds of crime. Yet, at the same time, it leads to fewer familial or private social controls in some aspects of women's lives but more legal controls, including arrest and official sanctioning. Increases in female arrests in, for example, minor property crime and driving under the influence reflect those trends. But female arrest trends also reflect the interplay of other factors outlined earlier, including the greater economic insecurity of women and the increased opportunities for female-type property crimes.

These explanations do not exhaust the possible forces shaping female arrest trends. For example, it is possible that greater numbers of working women increase crimes by women by contributing to a sense of relative deprivation among women who are being paid less than their male colleagues or even among women who are not working outside the home. Viewed this way, the female employment thesis may converge in some ways with the economic adversity hypothesis. Another possibility is that, in unknown ways, the informal social control structures that normally govern female behavior



have been weakened by recent societal changes. In reverse fashion, Boritch and Hagan (1990) have argued that an ever-increasing enforcement of informal middle-class norms of femininity helped to reduce deviance and crime among working-class women in Toronto in the early part of the 20th century. (Incidentally, they also report that female crime levels declined at the same time that female employment levels were rising.)

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study of gender and crime has improved dramatically in the decade of the eighties. We have better and more diverse data sets, more appropriate analytic techniques, and therefore more conclusive empirical findings. The debate about female emancipation and female arrest trends has been fruitful in that it has contributed to alternative explanations that offer both a richer and probably a more accurate portrait of the phenomenon. These alternative explanations have fared well in some empirical tests but they still rest on a good deal of speculation. My recommendations for future inquiry into female-to-male trends in criminal behavior, particularly arrest trends, include the following.

1. *Less attention to generalities and more to examples.* Instead of trying to generalize about the overall effect, say, of female emancipation or of shifts in the underworld on female offending, we should look at the effect of each of these factors on particular forms of crime. Instead of asking whether female crime has grown in a global sense, we should ask whether specific kinds of crime have become more common among particular groups of women and, if so, when and why the change occurred. There is a need to think more concretely about female arrest trends.

For example, research should consider less obvious links between female employment and crime, such as the circuitous path by which female employment gains may contribute to female arrests for fraud and forgery. Employment enhances the prospects for acquiring credit and securing loans, so that working women may have greater opportunities to commit credit-based frauds (see Steffensmeier and Streifel, 1992). This obviously is a very different causal path than that suggested by Simon.

2. *Localized studies of police and court statistics.* Studies of local police and lower-court records are needed to provide both a contextual understanding of the organizational management of crime (including changes in the law and in enforcement practices) and a detailed breakdown of the kinds of crime committed by women (and men). At present, we have too little systematic, qualitative data on the nature of contemporary female offending, especially as it compares to contemporary male offending or to female offending in the past. Such studies not only would help overcome a lack of

knowledge about which sorts of crimes might be subsumed under which FBI categories but also would provide a baseline for evaluating future trends in female crime.

3. *Background profiles, interviews, and case studies of female arrestees.* Eleanor Miller (1986, p. 5) has noted that those who read the UCR data as demonstrating the crime-producing effects of female emancipation, did so because "they were out of touch with who the typical female criminal in this country is on both a demographic and a personal level." Demographic profiles and case studies of female arrestees are needed to develop a portrait of female offenders and to describe the nature of their criminal roles and the circumstances leading to criminal involvement. In particular, we need to examine whether women and men commit the same types of crime for similar reasons, and whether those reasons have changed over time. Both historical and contemporary research suggests that women differ somewhat in their motivations to commit crimes and the vocabularies they use to justify their crimes. More so than for men, the law violations of women are often tied to an emotional relationship to others and the fulfillment of role expectations within that relationship. Women may use the money gained for personal excesses, but more often to fulfill a caretaking role or to maintain a love relationship (Zeitz, 1981; Simon and Landis, 1991; Steffensmeier and Allan, 1990).

4. *Changing ethnic/racial composition of urban areas.* There is a need to tease out statistically the effects of changes in the composition of the U.S. population on female-to-male arrest trends. For historical and cultural reasons, female-to-male involvement in some forms of crime (e.g., gang delinquency, drug dealing, serious property crimes) appears to be somewhat greater among Blacks and Hispanics than among Whites or Asians (Anglin *et al.*, 1987; Pennsylvania Crime Commission, 1991). If this is so, then the disproportionate influx of Blacks and Hispanics into the large urban centers with high crime rates would tend to increase the female share of offending, all else equal (Chilton and Datesman, 1986).

5. *Trend analysis by race, ethnicity, and class.* Along these same lines, because the effects of the societal changes on female crime described in this report may vary by class and race, there is a need to conduct trend analyses of the FP/A by class, race, and ethnicity.

6. *Declines in male arrest rates.* Male rates have declined over the past decade or so for some crimes such as burglary and robbery, producing a higher female share of offending for those crimes. We need a more careful assessment of why male arrest rates have declined for particular offenses.

7. *Sex differences in effects of trends in drug use/addiction.* Drugs have profoundly shaped the contemporary underworld, particularly the street crimes of the urban underclass. Most studies suggest that female involvement

in street crimes has been more affected by drug use than male crime. Accordingly, we need research to monitor the effects of drug patterns on female arrest trends.

8. *Changes in productive activities.* One of the most important research needs is to examine how changes in productive activity in American society have affected the nature of crime opportunities that its citizens encounter. Females made large arrest gains over the past three decades in the kinds of nonviolent economic crimes that are likely to continue to grow in significance as we approach the twenty-first century. Many of these crimes are within the reach of virtually every American citizen and are conducive to female involvement. Female-to-male arrest trends are likely to be influenced more by the nature of crime opportunities characterizing American society than by changes in female motivations or in the social and economic position of women. Research on this neglected area of criminology would benefit the study not only of female criminality but also of male criminality.

9. *Diffusion process and widespread involvement.* In some areas of deviance (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, drugs), it appears that once involvement has become widespread, and presumably less deviant, the female percentage of involvement will increase. In other words, sex ratios of deviance vary inversely with rates of deviance (Ferrence and Whitehead, 1980). In addition, males tend to be the early participants in new forms of deviance and peak levels of female involvement lag behind those of males. So, too, many forms of fraud, minor theft, employee pilferage, and even drug dealing have become widespread and increasingly diffuse throughout large segments of the population. The hypothesis that female arrest gains in some crime categories reflect a sort of diffusion process appears valid in very general terms and may be a fruitful area for future research.

10. *More cross-cultural and historical research.*<sup>7</sup> There is a need for cross-cultural and comparative studies that develop appropriate indicators of the alternative interpretations and assess their relevance for explaining trends in female-to-male criminality. The few studies that do exist provide overall support for the framework I have proposed (e.g., Box and Hale, 1984;

<sup>7</sup>A cross-national comparison helps to show how U.S. changes in currency, consumerism, and so forth have affected the crime opportunities of both sexes, but females more so than males. The female percentage of arrests for fraud and forgery is much higher in the United States (roughly 40%) than in the European nations (about 15%), even though the percentage of women working is as high or higher in those countries. The apparent reason for this difference is the lag of European nations behind the United States in a credit-based monetary system; fewer opportunities are thus provided for bad checks, credit card fraud, theft of services, and so forth. Note, also, that many of the European countries are moving toward a monetary system that is credit-driven, so that we would expect the percentage of female arrests for fraud and forgery to rise during the 1990s in European nations.

Steffensmeier *et al.*, 1989; Steffensmeier and Streifel, 1992). However, comparative research in this area will continue to be a formidable task because of the difficulty of locating time-series data not only on crime trends but also on suitable measures of alternative explanations.

11. *Multifaceted approach to gender roles.* There is both change and stability in gender roles, depending on which aspect of women's status is considered. The argument that the economic and occupational roles of women are rapidly changing, and that the changes have substantially affected female-to-male criminality, ignores other structures of male domination and the ways in which gender and gender relations structure social life. Gender is constructed not simply by roles but also by power relations (Daly and Chesney-Lind, 1988; Ferree, 1990; Mason 1986). Our inquiry or understanding of the relationship between crime and gender roles will yield different interpretations depending on how gender is conceptualized.

12. *Multivariate framework and more theoretical development.* At both the macro- and the microlevel, we need to place female arrest/crime trends within a broad multivariate framework. I have attempted to show how, through what mechanisms, some large-scale societal changes have influenced female-to-male arrest trends. More effort to unbundle and then tie together the alternative forces that are driving female arrest trends should help to integrate and make sense of the findings we already have as well as point the way toward new possibilities. That effort would also contribute to a better understanding of male criminality.

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