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# Race, Abuse, and Female Criminal Violence

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Gender-specific research on the relationship between childhood abuse and delinquency in females is an important emerging topic in criminology. Feminist criminologists have pointed toward childhood abuse as a key turning point in young girls' lives that leads toward delinquency but have yet to empirically address how this relationship varies along racial lines. This study uses prospective cohort data to test for interactions among child abuse, race, and violent criminal arrest in females. In doing so, it addresses the differences in the effects of abuse across gender and across race in females. Results provide some support for feminist literature finding that although all abused children were more likely to be later arrested for a violent offense, the effects were significantly stronger for abused girls than boys. Still, race and gender interactions reveal no racial differences in the effects of abuse on females.

**Keywords:** *gender; race; abuse; criminality; violence*

Child abuse has consistently been found to increase delinquency for both males and females (Gray, 1998). Studies on childhood victimization and delinquency have found abused children to be at increased risk for violent behavior (Dembo, Williams, Wothke, Schmeidler, & Brown, 1992; English, Widom, & Brandford, 2001; Herrera & McCloskey, 2003; Ireland, Smith, & Thornberry, 2002; Shaffer & Ruback, 2002; Siegel & Williams, 2003; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Widom & Ames, 1995; Widom & Maxfield, 2001), property crime (Dembo et al., 1992; Ireland et al., 2002), drug use (Dembo et al., 1992; Ireland et al., 2002; Kilpatric, Saunders, & Smith, 2003; Siegel & Williams, 2003), and other types of antisocial behavior (Acoca, 1998; Browne, Miller, & Maguin, 1999; Chandy, Bloom, & Resnick, 1996; Kaufman & Widom, 1999; Kilpatric et al., 2003; Kurtz, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 1991; Siegel & Williams, 2003; Zingraff, Leiter, Myers, & Johnson, 1993). Although the relationship between abuse and crime has seen a substantial amount of empirical support, less is known about how this relationship may vary according to gender.

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Recent literature that addresses issues of gender, childhood victimization, and delinquency suggests gender differences in the effects of childhood victimization on delinquency. Gendered studies on childhood victimization and delinquency have found child abuse and neglect to be stronger predictors of offending in females than in males (English et al., 2001; Hubbard & Pratt, 2002; Kakar, 1996). Feminist scholars explain this by pointing to childhood victimization as a turning point in young girls' lives that often puts them on a pathway toward delinquency (Arnold, 1990; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Silbert & Pines, 1981).

Although this body of research highlights the need for gender-specific research that explains the link between childhood victimization and delinquency, it has yet to examine racial differences within the female population. Recent postmodern feminist works have outlined a need to better understand how race and class intersect with gender to predict criminality (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Potter, 2006). For example, Potter (2006) points to the danger of lumping all females into one group when explaining female criminality. This critique of traditional feminist theory is referred to as gender essentialism and articulates the importance of viewing roles of race, class, and gender as interconnected forces that mold distinct identities for females (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Potter, 2006).

Simmons (2002) has addressed the intersection of gender, race, and class when explaining female aggression. She suggests that minority females tend to act with physical aggression when faced with interpersonal conflicts in adolescence, whereas White females are more likely to use nonviolent, emotional aggression. Simmons believes that in the impoverished communities in which many minority females are socialized, resources are often only given to those assertive enough to demand them. Thus, minority girls must reject the submissive persona that middle-class White girls can afford to have and are forced to act in more assertive ways to cope.

Simmons's (2002) work suggests that to better understand female violence research is needed that addresses differences between how minority and White female offenders are socialized to respond to problems in adolescence. Because feminist research points to childhood victimization as a prevalent indicator of female criminality, it is important to understand how this risk factor varies by race. This intersection of race and abuse in female delinquency has yet to be empirically examined. This project uses official arrest data on a cohort of abused and neglected females to compare how the effects of childhood victimization vary by race in predicting violent criminal behavior.

## **Childhood Victimization, Race, and Female Delinquency**

### **Abuse and Feminist Criminology**

Noting the inattention that mainstream criminological theory has given female offenders, feminist criminologists have been critical of traditional explanations of

deviance (Belknap, 1996; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992; Daley & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Feminist perspectives have thus veered away from mainstream theory and have instead focused on differences between male and female offenders. One important difference that many feminist scholars point to is the high rate of childhood victimization that female offenders report (Belknap, 1996; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992).

Although Belknap and Holsinger (1998) admit that not all females who are victimized become criminals and that childhood victimization also occurs in males, they argue that female offenders are much more likely to report a history of victimization than males. For instance, the authors have more recently published a study that found incarcerated girls tend to report higher rates of victimization than boys (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). Also, in a sample of incarcerated juveniles, Dembo et al. (1992) found that 65% of females had experienced sexual assault, versus only 24% of males. Acoca (1998) found that 88% of incarcerated girls in the California juvenile justice system experienced some form of emotional abuse and 81% reported some form of either sexual abuse or physical abuse.

Very similar findings have been reported for adult females. Harlow (1999) found females incarcerated in jail and state and federal prison and those on probation are much more likely to report a history of physical or sexual abuse than males. In their study of incarcerated women, Browne et al. (1999) found that 70% reported some form of extreme physical abuse and 59% reported some form of extreme sexual abuse as children.

This body of research indicates a connection between female offenders and childhood victimization. A feminist argument, most clearly articulated by Belknap and Holsinger (1998), suggests a pathway that often begins with childhood victimization in the home, which is followed by running away to escape the abuse. Once on the street, running away becomes a double-edged sword, and females are forced to commit crimes to cope with life on the streets. This theoretical perspective draws from retrospective, in-depth interviews of women offenders. In one such study, Silbert and Pines (1981) found that 60% of the prostitutes they interviewed reported being sexually abused before the age of 16. Silbert and Pines point out that almost all of their respondents felt that the only way to escape the abuse was to run away. This was followed by prostitution once on the street to obtain resources to survive.

## **Gender, Abuse, and Delinquency**

Research that has addressed the link between child abuse and delinquency provides varying support for feminist theories of abuse and delinquency. Empirical research has found a relationship between delinquency and child abuse in both male and female samples (Acoca, 1998; Dembo et al., 1992; English et al., 2001; Herrera & McCloskey, 2003; Ireland et al., 2002; Shaffer & Ruback, 2002; Siegel & Williams, 2003; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Widom & Ames, 1995; Widom & Maxfield, 2001;

Zingraff et al., 1993). Some studies indicate childhood victimization increases the likelihood of violence (Shaffer & Ruback, 2002), others indicate that it increases nonviolent delinquency (Acoca, 1998; Zingraff et al., 1993), and some found childhood victimization to increase the likelihood of both violent and nonviolent delinquency (Dembo et al., 1992; English et al., 2001; Herrera & McCloskey, 2003; Ireland et al., 2002; Siegel & Williams, 2003; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Widom & Ames, 1995; Widom & Maxfield, 2001). Research also indicates that as the severity of childhood victimization increases, the relationship between abuse and delinquency gets stronger (English et al., 2001; Ireland et al., 2002; Kakar, 1996; Lemmon, 1999; Smith & Thornberry, 1995).

Most studies that use mixed samples (both males and females) control for gender and find that being male tends to increase the likelihood of delinquency (English et al., 2001; Ireland et al., 2002; Kakar, 1996; Kaufman & Widom, 1999; Zingraff et al., 1993). Furthermore, studies that examine the effects of childhood victimization in females have found consistent relationships linking child abuse and female delinquency (Acoca, 1998; Chandy et al., 1996; English et al., 2001; Herrera & McCloskey, 2003; Hubbard & Pratt, 2002; Kakar, 1996; Siegel & Williams, 2003; Widom & Maxfield, 2001).

Research examining gender differences has shown abuse and neglect to be more important risk factors for females than for males. For example, English et al. (2001) examined arrest records in a maltreated group and compared them to a control group matched on sociodemographic variables. Although they found a significant relative risk for maltreated males being arrested throughout their lifetime, females' relative risk was higher. Furthermore, when comparing the effects of abuse by gender for violent offenses, these differences increased.

Kakar's (1996) work provides insight into differences of severity of abuse by gender. She found that although severely abused females were more likely to be delinquent than those who were less severely abused, males who were severely abused were not more likely to be delinquent than those who experienced less severe abuse. In sum, although research has indicated child abuse is an important risk factor for both males and females, there is some research that has specifically addressed gender and childhood victimization and found it to be a more salient risk factor for females than for males.

Although this body of research has provided important insight into gender differences in female criminality, it runs the risk of gender essentialism. As Burgess-Proctor (2006) explains, gender essentialism refers to a faulty assumption that gender is the only defining factor in female criminality. The criticism of this assumption is that it lumps females into a single group and fails to acknowledge the importance that race and class play in shaping the criminality of females (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Potter, 2006). This article seeks to address the essentialist critique by moving the current body of literature on gender, abuse, and delinquency beyond an examination of gender differences to see if there are racial differences in how abuse affects female criminal violence.

## Race, Abuse, and Female Criminal Behavior

There is very little either theoretical or empirical literature that examines how childhood victimization affects minority females. One retrospective study identified a pathway to African American female offending that is similar to those described by Belknap and Holsinger (1998). Arnold's (1990) in-depth interviews of 60 Black women incarcerated in jails and state prison explore childhood victimization and deviant lifestyles. Arnold explains that by running away to avoid being victimized and using drugs to dull their resulting emotional trauma, African American females are dislocated from socializing institutions (e.g., school, family, and religion), which results in an increased tendency to commit crime. This seems to provide a racially neutral approach that mirrors those of feminist theories targeted at the general female population.

Simmons (2002) provides a culturally specific theoretical explanation as to how female aggression varies between races by pointing to the intersection of gender, race, and class. She begins by explaining how aggression differs by gender. Simmons states that females act aggressively just as often as males but express aggression in different ways. She suggests that generally females tend to use "covert aggression" to deal with problems. Instead of fighting like boys when upset, White girls tend to find ways to secretly exploit others while maintaining a facade of "niceness."

Simmons (2002) notes, however, that the intersection of race and class changes the way that minority females learn to be aggressive. She explains that minority and lower-class girls tend to reject notions of niceness and act physically aggressive for two reasons, one revolving around socioeconomic status and one around culture. First, because of their economic marginality and the disproportionate number of minority females who grow up in violent and disorganized communities, it is no surprise these females learn at an early age that traditionally feminine ways of acting submissive are not survivable skills in their harsh and demanding environment. Second, Simmons argues that parents of minority children teach their daughters to act tough to cope with the harsh reality of racism and sexism that is forced on minority females. She argues that although being nice may work to the advantage of young White girls, these privileges are not extended to minority girls. Simmons thus points to the intersection of gender, race, and class when she suggests that minority females' identity is shaped to respond with violent, overt aggression when involved in interpersonal conflicts.

Siegel and Williams (2003) provide the only research that has prospectively tested the criminogenic effects of abuse on Black females. This research examines the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and delinquency in a predominantly Black (86%) sample of females. They report that victims of childhood sexual abuse are 130% more likely to be arrested for a violent offense as a juvenile while controlling for other factors. They point to race as a possible factor for explaining why childhood victimization increases arrests for violent crime because a matched sample of nonabused females (also predominantly Black) did not see the increases in violent arrest rates.

Siegel and Williams's (2003) and Simmons's (2002) research taken together suggest that minority females may differently respond to abuse when compared to

White females. From a feminist perspective, instead of running away and using drugs to cope with abuse, minority females may fight back or strike out at others. This suggests that when predicting violence, abuse may have a stronger effect on minority females than White females.

## Research Hypothesis

This research seeks to answer the question more generally defined by Simmons (2002) and more specifically defined by Siegel and Williams (2003). That is, this research addresses whether there is variation in an important gender-specific risk factor of female offenders. More specifically, this research seeks to test the hypothesis that childhood abuse has stronger effects on female criminal violence for minority females than it does for White females.

Testing this hypothesis will move the current literature beyond simple examinations of how abuse generally shapes all female criminal behavior. It seeks to examine whether there is important variation in the effect of abuse on different racial groups of females. Stated differently, this hypothesis will address the postmodern critique of gender essentialism by examining the interaction between race and abuse in female violent behavior.

## Method

### Data

The data used in this project were gathered by English et al. (2001) for a study that examined the effects of childhood victimization on delinquency, adult criminal behavior, and violent criminal behavior. As stated previously, in their final report, the authors separately examined the effects of abuse on violent criminal involvement for both males and females. They also examined the effects of abuse on violent criminal involvement for different racial categories. The authors did not examine the effects of abuse for racial categories of males and females separately. Although interesting in its own right, the scope of English et al.'s study was to examine how child abuse affects criminality in the entire population, not females in particular. Yet because they separately examined the effects of child abuse on violent criminal behavior along both gender and racial lines, the data provide an opportunity to examine racial variations in the effects of abuse on females.

The data for this research were collected as a prospective-cohorts design that compares the arrest records of youth in a large urban county in the northwest. Half of the sample were made dependents of the superior court because of reported abuse or neglect. The other half of the sample consists of a matched cohort from the same area with no record of abuse or neglect.

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Range or Count	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Socioeconomic status	1-7	2.92	2.078
Age	19-30	23.7	2.82
African American	388	0.23	0.42
American Indian	102	0.06	0.24
Female	906	0.53	0.50
Abused	862	0.5	0.5
Female interaction	453	0.26	0.44
African American interaction	194	0.11	0.32
American Indian interaction	51	0.03	0.17
Any violent arrest	84	0.05	0.22

The abused and neglected cohort for the original study was gathered from a sample of 2,262 individuals, which consisted of all of the dependency petitions of the court ages birth to 11 between 1980 and 1984 (English et al., 2001). After meeting exclusionary criteria, a total number of 877 abused and neglected individuals were included in the original cohort. Individuals were excluded if the child died, was born out of the state, was not made a dependent in the county of interest, was transferred out of the area, or had a dependency record that could not be found. Also, because of the small number of minority individuals who were not African American or Native American in the sample, this analysis is limited to only White, African American, or Native American individuals. This leaves the abused and neglected cohort with a total of 862 individuals.

The matched, nonabused, and neglected cohort was collected from birth records within the jurisdiction of the superior court (English et al., 2001). Each case in the abused and neglected group was assigned a pair that was matched by race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The matched cohort for the current analysis also excludes minorities who were not African American or Native American and consists of 862 individuals. Descriptive statistics for the sample are located in Table 1. This leaves a total sample of 1,724 participants, half of whom were made dependents of the court. Of these, approximately 53% (906) are female, 23% (388) are African American, and 6% (102) are Native American.

### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis is violent arrest. Some have argued that official arrest statistics are problematic because they measure criminal justice response to crime and do not capture crimes that go unreported to the police (Walker,



Spohn, & Delone, 2004). Furthermore, to the extent that criminal justice response is targeted toward specific groups (e.g., poor, minority communities), arrest statistics could be biased. Advocates of arrest data provide reason to have confidence in these statistics despite its criticisms. Piquero, MacDonald, Dorbin, Daigle, and Cullen (2005) point to research that has found self-report and official data to (a) identify a similar set of frequent and serious offenders (Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981; Huizinga & Elliot, 1986), (b) have similar results on a variety of offending topics (Farrington, 1989), and (c) have considerable reliability and validity (Hindelang et al., 1981).

To examine violent arrest, the arrest records of all individuals in the sample were followed through 1999. Juvenile court records provided information for juvenile arrests. Adult arrests were gathered from the records of local, county, state, and federal authorities. Generally, the following types of arrests were considered violent: homicide, assault, kidnapping, child abuse, sexual assault, and robbery (for a more specific explanation of what types of crime were categorized as violent, see Appendix A). A dichotomous variable (0 = no, 1 = yes) measures whether the individual was arrested for a violent crime.

## **Treatment Group**

Treatment or abused children in the study were made dependents of the court for being abandoned, abused, or neglected or when there was no capable guardian to care for the child. Five general reasons that children were made dependents of the court were being exposed to emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or physical abuse, being neglected, or having no capable guardian (see Appendix B for a list of the categories and types of abuse that would result in dependency being filed). A score of 1 for the dichotomous abused variable indicates that the individual falls into the treatment group, and 0 indicates that he or she is in the matched control group.

## **Control Variables**

In addition to the abuse variable, several variables that have been shown to affect criminal outcomes are held constant when conducting the analysis. Variables that account for gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status are used in the appropriate model. Gender is coded as a dichotomous variable using males as the reference group and coding female equal to 1. Race is measured with a series of dichotomous variables using White as the reference group. Two dummy variables are entered into each model, the first coding African American equal to 1, the second coding Native American equal to 1.

Age was measured as the participant's age at the time of data collection. Although age is typically used as a measure of risk, this study is examining the number of arrests accumulated up until data collection, so age does not provide this measure.

Still, age is important to hold constant because those who are older are more likely to have accumulated an arrest because of longer exposure time.

The original study provided a measure of socioeconomic status. This consisted of a scale that was created by conducting a cluster analysis of variables obtained from the census (English et al., 2001). These variables measured relevant socioeconomic factors (poverty level, median family income, etc.) from the census tract of each case (for a list of variables that were combined to measure socioeconomic status, see Appendix C).

## Analysis

The analysis in this study is presented in two steps. First, the entire sample is analyzed to examine gender differences in the effects of abuse on violent crime. This is done by testing interactions between gender and abuse on arrest while controlling for racial and socioeconomic differences. After gender differences are examined, the sample is split by gender and racial differences are analyzed for the effects of abuse on crime for females separately. That is, for the female subsample, interactions between each racial category and abuse are tested on violent arrest.

Logistic regression is used here to examine the effects of gender, race, and abuse on involvement in violent criminal behavior. Although other techniques have been used to examine the effects of nominal and metric scales on a dichotomous outcome, none produce unbiased estimates while at the same time achieving the goal of data reduction. Using simple ordinary least squares regression techniques to examine dichotomous outcomes has long been criticized because dichotomous variables are not continuous. Because the outcome is discrete and bonded by 0 and 1, problems with heteroscedasticity and correlated error emerge (for a more through discussion, see Hanushek & Jackson, 1977).<sup>1</sup>

## Results

### Gender, Abuse, and Violent Arrest

Table 2 presents the effects of abuse on violent arrest for the entire sample. The regression coefficients are reported next to the standard error associated with each coefficient. Exponential  $\beta$  is used here to report the odds ratio. Odds ratios are centered on 1, meaning that variables with odds ratios above 1 increase the odds of a violent arrest and variables below 1 are associated with a decrease in the odds. The distance between the odds and 1 can be interpreted as the change in odds ratio associated with a unit change in the variable of interest.

The first column indicates that those in the abused group are more likely to be arrested for a violent offense compared to the control group. The regression coefficient

**Table 2**  
**Entire Sample: Childhood Victimization, Gender Interaction,**  
**and Violent Arrest**

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Abused	1.338/0.141 (3.811**)	1.603/0.157 (4.966**)	1.406/0.179 (4.080**)
Socioeconomic status		-0.008/0.036 (0.992)	-0.009/0.036 (0.991)
Age		0.112/0.025 (1.119**)	0.111/0.025 (1.117**)
African American		1.543/0.170 (4.678**)	1.531/0.169 (4.622**)
Native American		0.569/0.283 (1.766*)	0.564/0.281 (1.758*)
Female		-1.549/0.152 (0.212**)	-2.172/0.352 (0.114**)
Female × abuse			0.809/0.391 (2.246*)
Constant	-2.308/0.119 (0.099)	-4.981/0.630 (0.007**)	-4.820/0.631 (0.008**)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.094**	.297**	.300**
-2 log likelihood	1537.422	1292.948	1288.228

Note:  $N = 1,724$ . Values are coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

is large, indicating that the natural logarithm of the odds ratio is 1.338 larger than those in the matched cohort. The odds indicate that the abused individuals are 2.8 times more likely to be arrested than their matches.

The second column displays results of a model with the control variables entered. When the control variables are added, the relationship between abuse and violence remains strong. Furthermore, the regression coefficients for all control variables, except socioeconomic status, are significant. For instance, the odds indicate that the abused group is almost 4.0 times more likely to be arrested for violence. Age coefficients indicate that for every year of age, the likelihood of arrest increases by 12%. Both race variables indicate that for the entire sample, minorities are more likely to be arrested relative to Whites. African Americans are 3.6 times more likely to be arrested for violence than are Whites, whereas Native Americans are 76% more likely to be arrested. The gender variable is significant and negative, revealing that females are 78% less likely to be arrested than are males.

Model 3 in Table 2 includes all control variables and an interaction term for female and abused. The interaction term is significant and positive, revealing that being abused places females at a higher risk for arrest than males. Adding the interaction term has little effect on the significance or strength of the relationship for any

**Table 3**  
**Females Only: Childhood Victimization, Race Interaction,**  
**and Violent Arrest**

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Abused	2.108/0.345 (8.234**)	2.176/0.349 (8.814**)	2.748/0.604 (15.615**)
Socioeconomic status		-0.045/0.063 (0.956)	-0.045/0.062 (0.956)
Age		0.080/0.043 (1.083)	0.079/0.043 (1.083)
African American		1.328/0.288 (3.773**)	2.177/0.727 (8.821**)
Native American		0.847/0.532 (2.333)	1.842/1.182 (6.307)
African American × abuse			-0.994/0.773 (0.370)
Native American × abuse			-1.165/1.318 (0.312)
Constant	-3.791/0.320 (0.023**)	-6.044/1.119 (0.002**)	-6.542/1.205 (0.001**)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.133**	.188**	.193**
-2 log likelihood	489.440	465.085	463.089

Note:  $N = 1,724$ . Values are coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

of the control variables in the model. Of note, the abused variable remains significant, suggesting that although being abused may place females at a higher risk for arrest than males, being abused still increases the odds of being arrested for males as well. These findings match those found in the original study (English et al., 2001) and show that they remain strong when holding race and exposure time constant.

### Gender, Race, Abuse, and Violent Arrest

Table 3 presents the findings for the female subsample. The abuse variable alone shows a strong effect on violent arrest, increasing the odds of arrest more than 7.2 times. Adding the control variables in Model 2 shows that African American and abused are the only significant variables in the model. The odds associated with a violent arrest are 2.7 times larger for African Americans relative to Whites and 7.8 times larger for abused individuals relative to the controls.

Model 3 includes interaction terms and reports that there is no significant difference in the effects of abuse on arrest between White females and either African American or Native American females. This suggests that although there may be

gender-specific effects of abuse on violent offending, the effects of abuse are not racially specific for female offenders. Worth noting, the signs of the coefficients for the interaction terms indicate a relationship opposite of that predicted by recent literature (Siegel & Williams, 2003; Simmons, 2002). The direction of the signs show that there were smaller percentages of abused African American and Native American females that are arrested relative to White females, but the standard error is too large to be confident that these differences are not because of error.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This research sought to examine the intersection of gender and race in the relationship between child abuse and violence. It drew on Simmons's (2002) work that suggests that for cultural and economic reasons, non-White females are more likely to respond violently in the face of adversity than White females. Prospective cohorts research by Siegel and Williams (2003) also suggest that race may play a key role in the relationship between abuse and female violence.

The findings from this research fail to provide any support for an argument that abuse will have a stronger effect on minority females relative to White females. It finds support for a racially neutral feminist argument that abuse is a stronger predictor of female violence than male violence. Still, the effect of abuse on different racial categories of females is not significantly different. Stated differently, being abused increases the risk of violent arrest in similar amounts for African American, Native American, and White females. This means that although the effects of abuse may be specific between males and females, the effects of abuse within the female population is general.

Although a more tentative conclusion, these results indicate that, if anything, abuse has less of an effect on minority than White females. The coefficients for the interaction terms indicate that odds for violent arrest are actually smaller for both groups of abused minority females than for abused White females, although they were not significant. The lack of significance is perplexing considering the relative strength of the regression coefficients reported for the interaction terms. This is likely because of the small number of women in each minority group used in the analysis. Considering the relatively large size of the coefficients, it is likely that with a larger sample (or at least an overrepresentation of minority females) these effects would have been significant. Future research should seek to oversample minority females and further examine this relationship.

If through replication of other samples it were shown that abuse has less effect on the criminal violence of minority women, there would be some interesting theoretical implications. It would mean that the feminist argument of gender-specific effects of abuse may be limited to White females. It would thus underscore a need for feminist criminologists to embrace a multicultural approach when addressing female criminality. If the pathway from abuse to criminality is limited to White females,

feminist criminologists should examine differences between the pathways of minority and White female offenders.

Class could be looked to as a possible explanation for a divergence in the pathways of White and minority women. Perhaps the disproportionate number of minority females who live in impoverished neighborhoods are affected by so many adverse strains that abuse is, sadly, one of many horrors with which they must deal throughout their lives. Baskin and Sommers (1998) provide a good discussion as to how the concentration of poverty shapes the identity of violent minority female offenders. Perhaps the concentration of sexual exploitation and victimization of women in their community makes violence against women feel like an everyday occurrence for minority females. Thus, minority females may be socialized to expect victimization and perhaps learn mechanisms to internally cope with abuse.

Along the same lines, it is clear that minority females in this study were at an increased risk for violence even after the effects of abuse were controlled. This suggests that there are important racial differences in the violent criminality of females and that abuse is unable to explain these differences. This also should push feminists to explore racial differences in female criminal tendencies beyond abuse. Although abuse may be important to understanding differences between males and females, there may be other variables that tap the intersection of race, class, and gender to explain differences between minority and White female offenders.

## **Appendix A**

### **Violent Criminal Arrest Types**

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#### Homicide

Attempted homicide, homicide, attempted murder, murder 1st and 2nd degree, vehicular homicide

#### Rape

Attempted rape, rape 1st through 3rd degree, rape of child 1st through 3rd degree, sexual assault

#### Robbery

Attempted robbery, robbery 1st and 2nd degree

#### Assault

Assault 1st through 4th degree, reckless endangerment 1st and 2nd degree, coercion, malicious harassment (hate crimes), custodial assault, interference with the reporting of domestic violence

#### Burglary

Burglary 1st degree

#### Kidnap

Attempted kidnap, kidnap 1st degree

#### Child maltreatment

#### Child abuse

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Source: Adapted from English, Widom, and Brandford (2001).

## Appendix B

### Abuse Descriptive Statistics for Entire Sample

Abuse Category	Count	Proportion
No abuse	862	.5
Emotional abuse	78	.05
Neglect	280	.16
Physical abuse	76	.04
Sexual abuse	77	.05
Multiple abuse	334	.19
No capable guardian	17	.01
Total	1,724	1.00

#### Abuse Categories and Subtypes

Codes based on Barnett, Manly, and Cicchetti's (1993) Maltreatment Coding Scheme

Physical abuse:

Torso, limb, face, buttocks, handling, choke burn, shake, nondescript

Sexual abuse:

Sexual stimuli or activities, requests for sexual contact, mutual sexual, touching, attempts to penetrate, forced intercourse

Neglect:

Failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical, hygiene

Lack of supervision—environment, substitute care

Emotional abuse:

Inappropriate responsibility, undermines child's relations, belittles child, ignores child's attention, uses fear to discipline, no age-appropriate social, role reversal, thwarts sense of maturity, rejects needs for affection, exposes to marital conflict, blames for family problems, excess expectations, serious threat to injure, derogatory names, binds hands and feet, exposes to inappropriate behavior, negativity or hostility, threatens suicide or abandonment, exposes to marital violence, blames child for death or suicide, confines and isolates, restrictive methods to bind, suicidal attempt, homicidal attempt, abandons 24 hours or more, extremely restrictive binds, confines in enclosed space

Source: Adapted from English, Widom, and Brandford (2001).

## Appendix C

### Socioeconomic Scale

Population of census tract in which participant was born

Percentage of population younger than 14 years of age

Percentage of single female head of household

Percentage of single female head of household

*(continued)*

**Appendix C (continued)**

- Percentage of single female head of household with children
- Percentage of families below poverty
- Percentage of African American below poverty
- Percentage of Native American below poverty
- Percentage of Asian below poverty
- Mean family income
- Median family income
- Percentage of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children
- Percentage of persons (> 25) graduated high school

Note: The variables were used by English, Widom, and Brandford (2001) to create a socioeconomic scale. The information was taken from the 1980 census tract in which each case was born and included in a cluster analysis.

**Appendix D  
Bivariate Correlation Matrix**

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Socioeconomic status									
2. Age	.051*								
3. American Indian	.126*	.022							
4. African American	.364*	.017	-.135*						
5. Female	-.020	.036	-.067	-.055*					
6. Abused	.000	-.019	.000	.000	.000				
7. Gender × abuse	-.011	.009	-.038	-.031	.567*	.597*			
8. American Indian × abuse	.087*	.010	.696*	-.094	-.047	.175*	.051*		
9. African American × abuse	.241*	.003	-.089*	.661*	-.037	.356*	.171*	-.062*	
10. Violent arrest	.098*	.094*	.028	.248*	-.254*	.239*	-.040	.050*	.269*

\* $p \leq .05$ .

**Note**

1. A cross-tabular analysis of odds can provide unbiased estimates of the likelihood of falling into one group over another but requires separate analysis and tables for every category of each independent variable. It is easy to see how this can become problematic when there is a need to control for several variables. Logistic regression is a good solution because it uses maximum likelihood to provide unbiased estimates of the odds of falling into one group relative to another for all variables included in the analysis.



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