

**SEX DIFFERENCES IN THE SOLITARY
AND ASSAULTIVE FANTASIES
OF DELINQUENT AND NONDELINQUENT ADOLESCENTS**

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Self-images expressed in response to the *Draw-A-Story* task were examined for differences in gender, age, and delinquency. Subjects included 64 adolescents in detention in California and 74 normal controls attending schools in Ohio, New York, and Florida; 82 were males (53 delinquents, 29 controls); 56 were females (11 delinquents, 45 controls). Their ages ranged between 13 and 17. The first analysis evaluated whether gender or delinquency was related to self-image scores. No significant differences were found. The second analysis evaluated whether the proportions of drawings about solitary subjects or assaultive relationships differed depending on gender or delinquency. Significant gender differences were found in both solitary and assaultive content. The findings of assaultive content were reversed for solitary content. For assaultive content, the differences in proportion between male and female control subjects reached significance. The difference between male and female delinquents did not reach significance. Control males differed significantly from control females, but delinquent males did not differ significantly from delinquent females. Solitary content also distinguished between delinquent and control groups, as well as gender. The gender difference was large in the control group but small in the delinquent group. Delinquent female drawings were more like the male drawings of both groups. Thus greater gender differences were found among normal adolescents than among delinquent adolescents. Implications of the findings for access to fantasies and to screen for emotional needs are discussed.

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences in attitudes toward self and others expressed through drawings and stories. An extension of earlier studies, the focus was on delinquent and nondelinquent adolescents who responded to a drawing task: respondents were

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examined for differences in gender and delinquency, as scored on a rating scale that ranges between strongly negative content, such as drawings about mortal danger, and strongly positive content, such as drawings about loving relationships.

Background

Several studies have found that males focus on independence and competition while females focus on affiliation and relationships (Tannen, 1990; Gilligan, Ward, Taylor, & Bardige, 1988). A study sponsored by the American Association of University Women (1992) found that girls experience a decline in self-esteem during early adolescence.

Stapley and Haviland (1989) found gender differences in the self-reports of emotional experiences by adolescents. Girls experienced emotions in affiliative interactions. Among boys, outer-directed negative emotions predominated whereas inner-directed negative emotions were more characteristic of girls. They also found that gender differences in psychopathology parallel gender differences in normal emotional functioning.

Rhodes and Fisher (1993) found that inner-city adolescents in a court diversion program were more likely than females to engage in aggressive offenses.

Although these investigators depended on verbal interviews and self-reports, drawings can also be used for access to attitudes and fantasies. It is theorized that attitudes evident in verbal conventions can also be evident in visual conventions and that drawings tend to be less guarded than talk. A study of 436 children, adolescents, and adults found that males tend to draw fortunate subjects living in dangerous worlds while females portray their fortunate subjects in pleasant worlds, unfortunate subjects in unpleasant worlds (Silver, 1987). A subsequent study of 531 children, adolescents, and adults also found gender differences in drawings about solitary objects and drawings about interpersonal relationships (Silver, 1993a). Across five age groups, males tended to express negative attitudes toward relationships and showed significantly stable and a higher frequency of drawing about assaultive relationships. Females expressed both positive and negative attitudes toward relationships. Larger proportions of younger adolescent girls than any other adolescent age group drew pictures about stressful relationships. They also expressed more positive attitudes toward solitary subjects than did any other male or female age group. A third study included 203 females and 157 males, most of whom had been diagnosed as clinically depressed, emotionally disturbed, or learning disabled (Silver, 1993b). These respondents expressed more negative than positive attitudes toward both solitary subjects and relationships. Across five age groups, 41% of the females

and 49% of the males expressed negative attitudes toward solitary subjects. In drawings about relationships, 72% of the males drew assaultive or stressful relationships while females were both positive (29%) and negative (34%) as well as ambivalent or ambiguous (37%).

The question as to whether the principal subjects of drawings represent self-images has also been addressed. Respondents drew pictures about principal subjects of the same gender as themselves to degrees found significant at the .001 level of probability (Silver, 1992, 1993a, 1993b).

METHOD

In the present study, 138 adolescents were asked to respond to the *Draw-A-Story (DAS)* task (Silver, 1988/1993). Their responses were divided by gender and delinquency into drawings about solitary subjects and drawings about relationships, then evaluated on a 5-point rating scale based on attitudes toward the self-images or relationships portrayed. Their mean scores were also analyzed and compared.

Subjects

The subjects included 82 boys and 56 girls ages 13 to 17. The delinquent subjects included 53 boys and 11 girls, wards of a Juvenile Court committed to a residential treatment facility for adolescents in California. Most were incarcerated for the first time. They included all students attending four English classes in the facility who responded to the stimulus drawings in *DAS Form B*, presented in their classroom by a registered art therapist.

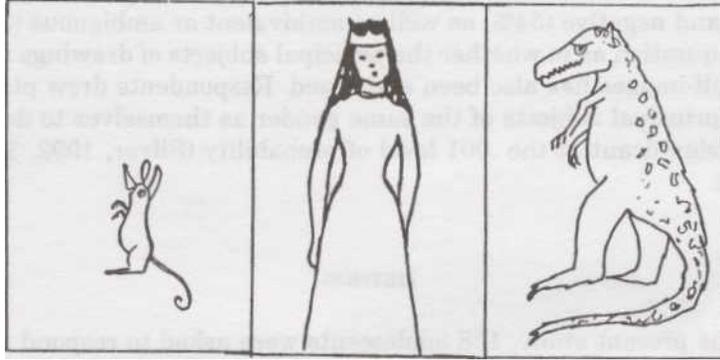
The control subjects included nondelinquent, presumably normal adolescents, 29 boys and 45 girls, attending four schools in Ohio, Florida, and New York. They included all students attending English or other classes in their schools. They responded to the stimulus drawings in *DAS Form A*, presented by classroom teachers or registered art therapists.

Instrument

DAS Forms A and *B* are different sets of 14 stimulus drawings of people, animals, places, and things. Examples are shown in Figure 1. Previous studies have shown an equivalence between responses to the two sets of stimulus drawings.

The drawing task asks examinees to choose two subjects from a set of stimulus drawings, imagine something happening between the subjects they choose, then show what is happening in drawings of their

Figure 1



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own. They are encouraged to change the stimulus drawings and add their own subject matter and ideas, then write brief stories about what is happening in their drawings.

The assessment instrument is a continuum ranging between 1 and 5 points. The score of 1 point is used to characterize strongly negative content, such as drawings about assaultive relationships or sad solitary subjects. The score of 5-points is used for strongly positive content, such as drawings about loving relationships or successful solitary subjects. Scores of 2 and 4 points are used respectively for moderately negative and moderately positive responses, and the intermediate score, 3 points, for ambiguous, ambivalent, or unemotional responses.

RESULTS

The first analysis examined whether gender or delinquency were related to self-image scores on the rating scale. A group (delinquent versus control) by gender (male versus female) 2 x 2 ANOVA was conducted on the self-image ratings. No significant results were obtained (the male mean score was 2.52, the female mean score, 2.92).

The second group of analyses examined whether the proportions of responses with assaultive or solitary content differed depending on gender or delinquency. These proportions are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Overall, males and females differed on both assaultive content (Chi-square (1) = 11.00, $p < .01$) and solitary content (Chi-square (1) =

Tablet. Assaultive content in the drawings of delinquent and control, male and female

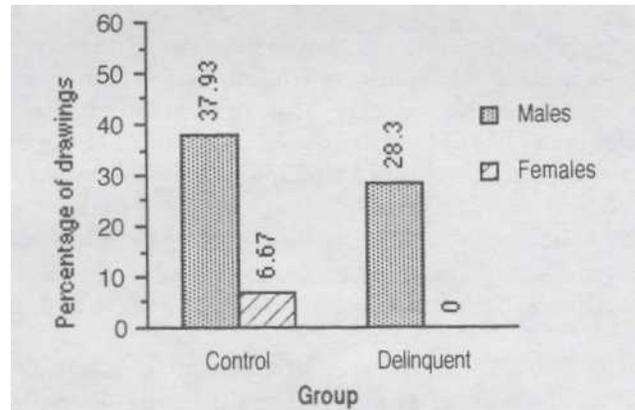
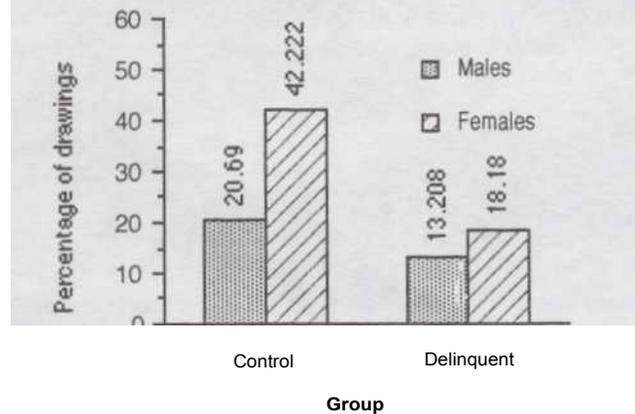


Table 2. Solitary content in the drawings of delinquent and control, male and female adolescents.



6.33, $p < .05$); 31.7% of the males drew pictures about assaultive relationships as compared with 5.4% of the females. The effect was reversed for solitary content: 37.5% of the females drew pictures about solitary subjects as compared with 15.9% of the males. Solitary content also distinguished between delinquent and control groups: 33.8% of the control subjects drew solitary subjects as compared with 14.1% of

the delinquent subjects. These main effects were modified by interactions indicating that the differences were not uniformly distributed across groups. For assaultive content, the interaction was: Chi-square (1,1) = 12.01, $p < .001$. For solitary content, the interaction was: Chi-square (1,1) = 8.82, $p < .01$.

In drawings about assaultive relationships, the difference in proportion between male and female control subjects reached significance (Chi-square (1) = 9.11, $p < .01$). The difference between male and female delinquents did not reach significance: 28.3% of the male delinquents drew assaultive relationships; no female delinquents drew assaultive relationships. Although control males differed significantly from control females, delinquent males did not differ significantly from delinquent females. Aggressive humor was found in 45.4% of drawings about assaultive relationships by control males but not found in any other group.

In drawings about solitary subjects, the gender differences were again large in the control group, but small in the delinquent group. Drawings by the delinquent girls were more like drawings by the boys in both groups. When *negative* attitudes toward solitary subjects were examined, gender differences in both delinquent and control groups were found. Proportionally more girls than boys drew sad or helpless solitary subjects (delinquent girls, 18.1%; control girls, 17.8%; delinquent boys, 9.4%; control boys, 6.9%). When positive attitudes toward solitary subjects were examined, the control groups predominated: control girls, 20%; control boys, 13.8%; delinquent boys, 3.7%; delinquent girls, 0).

DISCUSSION

When mean scores were examined, no differences in gender or delinquency were found. Differences appeared, however, when drawings about assaultive relationships or solitary subjects were examined more closely.

Assaultive Relationships

As before, more boys than girls drew pictures about assaultive relationships. It was surprising, however, to find that proportionally more nondelinquent than delinquent boys drew assaultive relationships, as shown in Table 1.

Perhaps the finding can be explained by the difference between fantasizing about violence and acting violently. A boy who has internal-

ized prohibitions against acting out biological drives, may fantasize more than one who commits assaultive acts. It may also be that incarceration for antisocial behavior inhibited expressing assaultive fantasies.

Although most drawings about assaultive relationships seemed to express wish-fulfilling fantasies, others seemed to express conflict or denial. Among the delinquent boys who drew assaultive fantasies, 47% seemed to feel a need to justify the violence they expressed. For example, characters who seemed to be self-images killed bad guys in order to protect innocent victims, or retaliated only after being hurt. One delinquent, age 15, copied and embellished the stimulus drawing of a loving couple, then added a fist striking the girl's face. His story: "This boy was with my girlfriend and I caught them together and beat her up.

A similar proportion of nondelinquent boys who drew assaultive fantasies (45%) used aggressive humor, perhaps a form of defense or denial. To illustrate, Figure 2 is the response of an 18-year-old who seems to identify with Godzilla in his drawing, biting off the mouse's tail

Figure 2



before chomping him, using humor to mask or deny a murderous wish.

No humor was found in the assaultive fantasies of delinquent boys or nondelinquent girls, and no delinquent girl drew assaultive fantasies.

Solitary Subjects

As in previous studies, most respondents drew pictures about relationships, perhaps because they were asked to draw something happening between the subjects they chose. Nevertheless, some chose stimulus drawings of inanimate objects or landscapes and associated them with solitary human or animal subjects.

In the present study, more girls than boys drew pictures about solitary subjects, and again the gender differences was larger among the nondelinquent adolescents, as shown in Table 2.

In addition, proportionally more girls than boys expressed negative feelings about the solitary subjects they portrayed. Regardless of delinquency, more than twice as many girls as boys drew sad, isolated, or endangered solitary subjects, scored 1 point, as shown in Table 3.

One delinquent girl, age 17, simply traced the four stimulus drawings she chose (sad, angry, and sulking solitary figures, and a kitchen environment). Her story: "Today I feel lonely like I don't have anyone. But other days I feel like fighting and just be angry at the world. And other days I feel like I'm just there with nothing to do. And then sometimes I just be hungry to death and just be wishing I could go fix me something to eat."

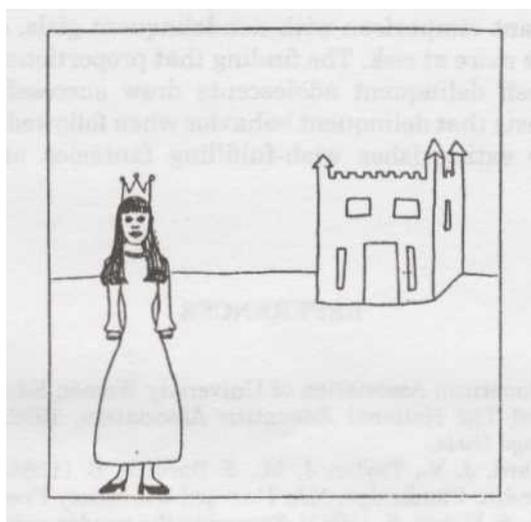
Figure 3 is the response of a nondelinquent girl, age 14, who chose stimulus drawings of a princess and a castle. Her story: "The princess is depressed because everyone assumes because she lives in a castle and dresses well, she is rich and, therefore, stuckup!" The princess seems to be herself expressing an immediate concern.

At the other end of the scale, proportionally more nondelinquent than delinquent adolescents drew solitary subjects achieving goals.

**Table 3: Characteristics of Solitary Subjects in Drawings
 by Delinquent and Nondelinquent Adolescents**

			Successful	
53 Delinquent.. Boy	5	9.43%	2	3.77%
11 Delinquent Girls	2	18.18%	0	0
29 Nondelinquent Boys	2	6.90%	4	13.79%
45 Nondelinquent Girls	8	17.78%	9	20.00%

Figure 3



Successful self-images appeared more often in drawings by nondelinquent girls than nondelinquent boys. No delinquent girls drew successful solitary subjects.

In considering the implications of these findings, it should be kept in mind that the delinquent and nondelinquent groups were exposed to different sets of stimulus drawings. Since the studies cited earlier suggest that the principal subjects of response drawings represent self-images, negative drawings about solitary subjects (scored 1 or 2 points) seem to represent negative self-images, while positive drawings (scored 4 and 5 points) represent either positive self-images or wish-fulfilling fantasies.

Strongly negative drawings about solitary subjects (scored 1 point) may indicate feelings of withdrawal, isolation, or rejection. As such, they could provide opportunities for identifying emotional needs as well as for early interaction.

The finding that approximately 18% of both delinquent and nondelinquent girls expressed negative feelings toward self-image solitary subjects concurs with the findings of other investigators, cited earlier, that adolescence seems to be a particularly difficult time for some girls, and that girls tend to experience emotions in affiliative interactions, even when drawing solitary subjects, as suggested by Figure 3. However, it should be noted that another 20% expressed positive feelings toward the solitary subjects in their drawings.

None of the delinquent girls expressed positive feelings toward the solitary subjects. It may be that the sample of delinquent girls was too small to warrant comparison with nondelinquent girls, or that delinquent girls are more at risk. The finding that proportionally more nondelinquent than delinquent adolescents drew successful self-image subjects suggests that delinquent behavior when followed by incarceration, dims or extinguishes wish-fulfilling fantasies and hopes for success.

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