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**DISSERTATION**

**THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND PARENTAL  
SCHOOL SUPPORT ON DELINQUENT BEHAVIORS: AN  
ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND ETHNIC FACTORS**

**Submitted by**

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**In partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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**Fort Collins, Colorado**

**Spring 2000**

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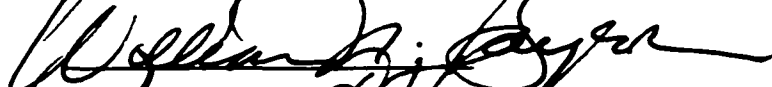



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**ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

**THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND PARENTAL  
SCHOOL SUPPORT ON DELINQUENT BEHAVIORS: AN ANALYSIS  
OF GENDER AND ETHNIC FACTORS**

This study examined variables associated with delinquency and sexual behavior in Latino and White non-Hispanic adolescents. Family relationship variables that were surveyed included the participants' perceived level of family communication and parental school support. Data analysis included investigation of the above stated variables, sexual behavior, and the relationship to gender and ethnicity. Results demonstrated that both family communication and parental school support were related to the likelihood of committing delinquent acts. There did not appear to be significant differences regarding males and females in the levels of family communication and parental school support. Regarding sexual behavior, on many measures there were no significant differences between males and females or White non-Hispanics and Latinos. There did appear to be differences in the age of initiation of sexual behavior, number of partners, and particular sexual acts. Future research may ascertain which types of interventions may be most effective regarding ethnicity and gender.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Research in the area of social deviance and delinquency has received attention throughout the years from a variety of interested fields. There have been psychological studies interested in the psychodynamic variables associated with acts of delinquency (Loeber & Stouthamer, 1986; Quay, 1983), sociological studies analyzing societal motivations for delinquency (Agnew, 1992; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979), and biological studies which attempt to find a genetic link to deviant acts (Mednick, Gabrielli, & Hutchins, 1987; Fishbein, 1990; Hippchen, 1981; Plomin, Nitz, & Rowe, 1990). Studies which analyze the factors associated with delinquency and criminal behavior are increasingly becoming more significant given that the United States is currently imprisoning more people than at any time in history and now possesses the second-highest incarceration rate in the world (Mauer, 1994). Regardless of the orientation one possesses pertaining to the causes of delinquency, it is clear that further research is needed to help establish correlates of delinquency and methods that may reduce the acts of delinquency.

Between 1980 and 1990, national violent crime arrests began to climb, reaching all-time highs in the early 1990's (Uniform Crime Reports for the United States, 1991). Sniffen (1998) reports a 23.5 percent increase in violent crime between the years of 1989 and 1996. Dreyfoos (1990) reports that in a study in 1986, 11 percent of all 15-17 year

olds had been arrested. Of these individuals, Latino<sup>1</sup> youth are incarcerated at rates approximately double their proportion in the general population (Flowers, 1988).

Research shows that adolescents, particularly minority youth, are increasingly becoming more susceptible to acting out in a delinquent manner (Siegal & Senna, 1994).

Delinquency, as defined by Morris (1980) is antisocial or criminal behavior by children or adolescents. He describes it as a serious problem for adolescents, but more specifically for minority youth.

The problems created by delinquent behaviors in the Hispanic population are becoming magnified with the increasing population growth rate stemming from high birth rates and rising immigration (Arias, 1986). The 1995 U.S. Census Bureau reports the Latino population at 22,354,059, representing 9% of the population, and indicating a 53% increase between 1980 and 1990 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1995). Latinos will account for most of the overall population growth between 1982 and 2020 (Pallas, 1989). Chapa reports that if the Latino population increases by 35% between 1990 and 2000, there will be over 30 million Latinos living in the United States at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is likely to occur based on the fact that between the years of 1980 and 1990 the Latino growth rate reached 53%. Given that this growth is likely to continue well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is important to focus on the Latino population and the issues concerning this population (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1986).

While there has been a wealth of studies seeking to describe the relationship of peer groups and gang involvement with delinquency (Agnew, 1991; Bowker & Klein,

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" will be used interchangeably (Chapa & Valencia, 1993).

1983; Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, and Jang, 1994; Warr & Stafford, 1991), there have been relatively few studies which analyze the impact of the individual's ability to communicate with his/her family regarding personal issues and developmental concerns. In Belitz and Valdez's (1995) work with Latino gang youth, they found specific family variables that were observed to underlie violent and aggressive behaviors exhibited in adolescents. These youths often report intense feelings of isolation and marginality within the context of their family, culture, and other systems (e.g. school). Additionally, there has been little analysis of how parents' view of education plays a role in the adolescent's attitudes and behaviors. By analyzing the types of relationships within the family which prove to deter delinquency, more effective theories of prevention may be developed. Such research is critical given that most interventions for delinquency do not intercede until delinquent acts have been committed.

### Delinquency: Definitions

The definition of delinquency appears to vary depending on the source and the area of study in which the behavior is being analyzed. Historians report that the concept of delinquency did not appear in America until November of 1646, when the General Court of Massachusetts Bay passed the "stubborn child law", which stated that children who disobeyed their parents could be put to death (Greven, 1991). It was not until 1899 that the term "juvenile delinquency" appeared in Chicago to describe the growing problems that were occurring with adolescents (Hurley, 1977). At that time delinquents were described as anyone "under the age of 16 years who violates any law of this State or any City or Village ordinance." For several decades, this broad definition of delinquency prevailed, and did not differentiate between status offenders, those who commit crimes

for which adolescents can be arrested but not adults (e.g. running away) or children who may deviate from the societal norms due to neglect or dependency rather than delinquency.

In 1949, Paul Tappan provided a “legalistic” definition that illustrated the vague concept of delinquency during this period. He wrote that a juvenile delinquent is “a person who has been adjudicated as such by a court or proper jurisdiction though he may be no different, up until the time of court contact and adjudication, at any rate, from masses of children who are not delinquent”(p.30). It was not until the 1960’s when the “baby boomers” began to reach their teenage years and delinquency rates began to soar that awareness of juvenile delinquency heightened. During this period, many states began to differentiate between what they perceived as more serious offenders versus individuals that they viewed as “worthy” of avoiding the severity of a criminal conviction (Peterson, 1988). This appears to be the first discrimination in delinquent behaviors between what was termed “youthful-offender status” and more serious delinquents. Beginning in the 1970’s the analysis and differentiation in classification for juvenile delinquents began to expand. During the late 1970’s, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) requested that there be discrimination between “unruly child” and “juvenile delinquent” (Krisberg & Austin, 1978). There were also legal distinctions created between children needing assistance versus supervision and “chronic status offenders” and “status offenders”. While juvenile delinquency has continued to attract interest and analysis, society still appears to lack a uniform and consistent understanding of what delinquency encompasses and how differences in delinquent behaviors should be addressed.

In the field of psychology, there also appears to be a certain degree of ambiguity concerning what type of behavior is delinquent. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) does not define delinquency, but does address behaviors typically associated with delinquency. "Oppositional Defiant Disorder" is defined as a recurring pattern of defiant, disobedient, and hostile behavior directed towards authority figures. A diagnosis necessitates that the individual exhibit four of the following six behaviors: "loses temper," "argues with adults," "defies adults," "deliberately annoys people," "blames others for his mistakes," "easily annoyed," "angry and resentful," and "is often spiteful or vindictive". Another childhood disorder described by the DSM-IV is "Conduct Disorder" which is characterized by behaviors in which the rights of others are violated or societal norms are broken. Similar to Oppositional Defiant Disorder, the individual must demonstrate problematic behavior in a number of areas. For Conduct Disorder, an individual must be under 18 years of age and exhibit problematic behaviors such as "aggression to people and animals," "destruction of property," "deceitfulness or theft, and serious violations of rules". While these two types of diagnosis are not described as "delinquent," they do appear to be the two adolescent categories that best reflect what we perceive delinquency to be.

It is in the fields of sociology and social psychology that researchers begin to explore more environmental factors that may contribute to an individual's likelihood of committing delinquent acts. Orcutt (1983) describes social psychological theory as that which does not focus primarily on individual differences or abnormalities, but rather emphasizes "general, normal psychological conditions that make all people responsive to variations in the social environment" (p. 152).

One characteristic that appears evident in social psychology theory is the role of developmental factors. As Regoli and Hewitt (1994) point out, “We disagree with criminologists who think juvenile delinquency is something that pops up at the age of 12 and ends several years later” (p.7). They go on to offer an alternative definition of juvenile delinquency, which they describe as representing the “culmination of a process” beginning at birth and evolving throughout adolescence. Gottfredson and Hirishi (1990) postulate that parenting even in early childhood can impact one’s likelihood to become involved in delinquent behavior. They report that parenting which enables a child to resist impulses and delay gratification can aid that child in becoming more resistant to delinquent temptations later in life.

It is this theory with its emphasis on early childhood experiences and parental factors that will be focused on in this study.

### Theories of Delinquency

There are many theories that attempt to explain the causes of delinquency. Taylor, et al. (1997) report that a review of the literature shows that most studies of delinquency can be placed into a few extensive categories. The first includes biological studies which posit that delinquent behaviors stem from genetic causes or intellectual differences such as learning disabilities in which student’s failed attempts to compensate for their inadequate academic performance results in acting out (Fishbein, D., 1990; Hippchen, 1981; Hirschi, T. & Hindelang, M.J., 1977; Perlmutter, 1987). The second area is psychodynamic theory, which Taylor et.al. (1997) describe as factors related to familial nurturing. This theory pertains to lack of positive developmental experiences which lead to children behaving in a delinquent manner (Block, 1978; Denno, 1985). The third

category, socioenvironmental, has received attention from diverse fields. Probably one of the best known examples of a socioenvironmental theory is the Classic Strain Theory. The premise of this explanation is that delinquency results when individuals are unable to meet their goals. In the United States, it is believed that the dominant goal is to achieve monetary success or middle-class status (Agnew & Brezina, 1997). A great number of individuals in the population are said to have limited opportunities to achieve these goals through legitimate means. One barrier that prevents these individuals from attaining their goals is their inability to complete high school. Catterall (1985) reports that those that who do not graduate from high school can expect that in their lifetime they will earn less than \$199,000 for women and \$266,000 for men. Merton (1938), one of the original founders of strain theory, would say that since the monetary goal becomes seemingly unattainable to the individual who does not finish high school, the situation produces pressure to resolve the strain by some alternative method. Therefore, these individuals try to attain these goals through illicit means or retreat into delinquency as an alternative or escape.

#### Delinquency and Females: Statistics

Research in the area of female delinquency only began to appear in the 1960's when scientists believed that delinquency in females primarily manifested in sexual misconduct (Cohen, 1955). Since that time, females have engaged in increasingly more delinquent acts in a wider range of activities. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1988), females under the age of eighteen committed five times the number or delinquent acts in 1987 than were committed in 1960. The acts that appeared to show

the greatest increase in number included property crimes (e.g. theft), and drug and alcohol-related crimes.

According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, in 1991, boys constituted 81% of all delinquency referrals to juvenile courts (Butts et. al., 1994). A possible reason for this discrepancy between rates of delinquency is the possibility that females may be committing delinquent acts in ways that are less likely to be seen and arrested. Vedder and Somerville (1970) reported that while most girls were incarcerated for offenses which fit into what they described as the “big five” (running away from home, incorrigibility, sexual offenses, probation violation, and truancy), they believed that the “underlying vein” in almost all arrest was sexual misconduct. This sentiment that sexual activity in females is associated with delinquency in women has persisted over time and throughout the world. Naffine (1989) who studied different types of offenses that women committed found that, in Australia, most women charged with status offenses were girls who had “acquired sexual intercourse” with several young men.

A further complication in the analysis of frequency of female delinquent acts is the possibility that females are often not “caught” for their acts and often the recording of their crimes may under represent the reality of the frequency.

### Delinquency Theory and Females

Taylor et al. (1997) reports that the majority of data in the field of delinquency has been related to deviance in boys. It is unclear whether the scarcity of research regarding female deviance is due to a lack of interest, or to the general under representation of females in the juvenile system. In the mid-nineties, women accounted for only 18.8% of all arrests in the United States and in “serious” offenses (e.g. murder, forcible rape,

robbery, and aggravated assault), only 14% were female (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1995, p.222). As stated in the previous section, one possible explanation for females' lack of representation in the juvenile justice system is due to the types of delinquent acts that females commit (Vedder & Sommerville, 1970.)

There are theorists that believe that the previously discussed theories of delinquency hold true for both males and females (Simons, Miller, & Aigner, 1980). Others argue that since the goal for females differs from males in the strain theory, the manifestation of the delinquency may also differ. Beginning in 1964, Morris argued that monetary assets are not what drive women, instead it is the need for interpersonal relationships. More recently, others have continued to claim that establishing close ties with others primarily impels females (Brown & Gilligan, 1995). This gender difference in goals may be partially explained through socialization (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1995). Developmentalists agree that adolescence is a phase of an individual's life when the individual is primarily concerned with transitions in self-identity and developing relationships with others (Durkin, 1995). Where researchers tend to disagree is in the study of the primary goals during this period of identity development. Research that has sought to examine these developmental issues, has found that females do tend to have relationships that are more intimate and held in higher regard than males, seemingly proving that relationships hold greater importance to women (Aukett, Ritchie, & Mill, 1988, Bell, 1981). This drive, termed "affiliation motivation" (Mazur, 1989) apparently allows women to derive greater therapeutic value through relationships while also putting them at risk for more relationship-based problems. Frost & Averill (1982) found that

with this increased importance placed on relationships, women appear to experience more distress when interpersonal problems occur.

With research suggesting that the motivation for women may be the fulfillment of relationships rather than monetary success, theorists began to hypothesize how the type of delinquency for females may differ from males. Leonard (1982) argued that an inability to achieve relationships through “legitimate” channels would lead to delinquency in the form of sexual deviance. Recently, research has shown those relational problems that females experience may manifest in a number of ways. For example, Chesney-Lind & Shelden (1992) hypothesize that relationship problems may lead to escape behaviors, such as running away and avoidance of school. They also view property offenses as a possible manifestation of delinquency, particularly if the female believes that the theft of an object may make her more attractive. Agnew (1992) added that a possible manifestation of delinquency for females is aggressive behaviors. He added that these behaviors might be directed toward individuals involved in problematic relationships with the perpetrator or others that she may see as a threat to her relationship. He also hypothesized that females may abuse substances to help deal with their negative feelings. The above stated expressions of delinquency support the explanation that females’ lack of representation in the juvenile justice system may be due to the less prosecutable types of delinquency perpetrated by females.

Unfortunately, the apparent lack of interest regarding female delinquency is accompanied by a dearth of research pertaining to intervention for female delinquents. One study, which reviewed 75 private foundations, reported that only approximately 3.4% of funding was targeted for female interventions (Valentine Foundation, 1990).

One possible explanation of the overrepresentation of programs targeted at males is that the crimes that are committed by males are more noticeable than those committed by young women (Alder, 1995). This is consistent with data which posits that the types of crimes committed by females differ from males in that they are typically less violent and may be what we consider more less dramatic (e.g. petty theft) or less open to the public (e.g. drug use and prostitution). Klein & Kress (1976) posit that the types of crimes committed by the majority of women delinquents are in the realm of “trivial” property offenses and “moral” offenses, suggesting that women’s crimes reflect their roles in society

Women do however appear to monopolize one crime – prostitution. Females account for approximately 61.3% of all prostitution arrests. While prostitution appears to be the central crime viewed as a feminine crime, Chesney et.al. (1997) assert that this crime may be the “major gateway” to women’s entrance into other forms of criminal behavior. Females appear to be gradually growing in their arrest in other, typically male-dominated crimes, such as violent offenses which rose from 10.9% to 14% between 1985 and 1994 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1994). Given that we have also witnessed a near quintupling of the women’s prison population since the early 1980’s, these initial pathways which lead to criminal behavior need to be targeted and dealt with in a more effective manner. Some studies report that up to 1/3 of imprisoned women report experiencing some type of childhood abuse, suggesting that the experiences that young women encounter appear to have significant effects on their likelihood to become involved in illegal acts (Snell & Morton, 1994). Many also realize the diverse experiences of girls of differing socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Research indicates

that more than half of the women in the nation's prison system are African American (46%) and Hispanic (14.2%). Regionally, in the California area the numbers show a greater representation of Hispanic females (43%) (Miller, 1994). Given that there often appears to be a disproportionate representation of minorities in the criminal justice system, the problems that appear to be confronting these women need to be considered (Snell & Morton, 1994). Researchers state that when we attempt to prevent and treat young women who are engaging in delinquent behaviors, we must take into account the unique developmental qualities of these individuals and tap into the possible cultural resources that may be available in certain ethnic communities (Amaro & Agular, 1994; LaFromboise & Howard-Pitney, 1995).

#### Family Communication and Delinquency

Cashwell & Vac (1996) write that while we focus our funding for delinquency on programs that are directed towards individuals that are already in the juvenile justice system, we may be avoiding the root of this problem. Kuppertsmidt & Patterson (1991) reported that teachers have shown that they can effectively identify students who appear to be engaging in antisocial behaviors and are therefore at a higher risk for delinquent behavior. Intervening at an early stage by having the family become involved may be a more useful and cost-effective method of addressing the delinquency problem.

While the "broken home" hypothesis dominated for several decades, researchers are beginning to turn to more specific aspects of the parent/child relationship rather than only relying on the marital status of the adolescents' parents (Wells & Rankin, 1991). Social science research has established a relationship between juvenile delinquency and family relationships with a number of family factors identified as consequential (Clark &

Shields, 1997). Included in these components are family attachment, relationships between parents and children, family management, and the way in which the family assigns roles and rules. Many authors have noted this theme of family attachment variables influencing delinquent behaviors (McCord, 1991 & Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, Conger, 1991). Clark and Shield's (1997) define attachment as the emotional bond between the parent(s) and the child which may insulate a child from delinquent behavior. Rosenbaum's (1989) research has shown that youths whose bond with their parents is weak appear more susceptible to delinquency. Others have found that the structure of the family is not necessarily a predictor of delinquency, but the interactional patterns within the family (Nye, 1958; Hirschi, 1969) may be predictive. While research has not shown that the family structure is a prerequisite for delinquency, some theorists have argued that it is the maternal rejection that proves most detrimental (Loeber, 1983). Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle (1983) have proposed that parental rejection is not the only negative pattern of interaction, but bonding that is too high can also prove to be problematic. He writes that low family cohesion can lead family members to feel "disengaged", or without a solid base to work from. On the other end of the continuum the individual can lose their sense of identity and feel "enmeshed". Olson et. al. (1983) believed that both of the extremes could lead to family dysfunction. Clark & Shields (1997) research illustrated that as individuals moved from enmeshed to disconnected, rates of delinquency increased. The mean number of delinquent acts committed by individuals who identified as "enmeshed" was 60.1 while individuals who identified as "disengaged" reported 235.0 delinquent acts over the same period of time.

In a study analyzing a number of family and socioeconomic status variables, Larzelere and Patterson (1990) found that parental monitoring, parental supervision, and socioeconomic status accounted for 46% of the variance in delinquent behavior. In Cashwell and Vac's (1996) investigation of family functioning, peer deviance, and delinquent behavior, family cohesion was found to be the strongest familial influence on delinquent behavior. In addition, minority adolescents who reported feeling supported by their parents not only have been found to have lower levels of delinquency, but also report experiencing less psychological distress (Hickel, K. & Newcomb, M.D., 1998).

#### Parental School Support and Delinquency

While most researchers agree that family relationships play a role in the adolescent's development, it remains to be seen what the impact of that relationship is on the youth's academic success. Dornbusch, Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, Chen (1990) describe the adolescent period as a time when the individual is balancing issues of autonomy and parental expectations in their decisions about the future. Kagan (1984) reports that the parent-child relationship and level of input may leave the adolescent feeling overly controlled or supported. He reports that if the parent makes decisions for the child without input, it leaves the child feeling that he/she may have little control over his/her destiny. On the other hand, if the child is able to discuss his parent's norms and expectations openly, the child may develop a sense of feeling valued by his parents. Clark (1983) argues that the family's ability to stimulate the child and encourage academic expectations during adolescence is a major contributor of academic success. Youths who feel that they do not have their parents' support and input may experience distress that affects school performance (Lewis, 1971). Dornbusch, et. al. (1990) concluded that

adolescents whose parents fail to communicate their standards and expectations may be less disposed to develop high academic norms. However, others have minimized the impact of family involvement on the youth's academic achievements (Lightfoot, 1978), and questioned the predictive ability of support on academic success.

In Kantrowitz and McCormick's (1992) discussion of the efficacy of Headstart, they posit that one possible explanation why the program did not succeed in making changes in individuals' lives is that the role of parenting was not addressed adequately. While they question the use of limited intervention, only when the children are pre-school age, they endorsed the idea of intervention for those who face additional barriers in their educational and life goals. One suggestion the authors propose is that parents need to be more involved in activities which help their children overcome their barriers. This involvement included having the parents become more integrated in the educational lives of their children. This study will try to determine if in fact those children who felt that their parents were supportive of school were more apt to complete high school and were able to avoid delinquent alternatives.

#### Latinos, Parental School Support and Family communication

Another area of exploration investigates whether there is a different relationship between parental school support and delinquent behaviors for minority youth. Delgado-Gaitan (1992) found that Hispanics tend to value the educational system because they view education as a means of obtaining success for their children. They also appear to value the teachers and personnel associated with school as being knowledgeable about what will be useful for their children (Lynch & Stein, 1987). Unfortunately, while Hispanic parents support their children academically, they are often unable to assist them

with their schoolwork due to the lack of skills or knowledge that are needed (Okagaki, Frensch, & Gordon, 1995).

This high regard for education is optimistic for Latino youth given Bernal, Saenz, & Knight's (1991) findings that when academic success is a value within the minority student's family and culture, behavior that promotes success is more likely to occur. This positive relationship is consistent with a national commission's finding that the more effective schools are those that attempt to build strong links with their communities and the families within those communities (National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics, 1984). It is when these children do not feel supported by their parents, or question how education fits in with their family traditions that the chances they will drop out begin to increase (Hess & Azuma, 1991; U.S. Office of Education, 1978).

Minority adolescents may also fight an additional barrier to educational success, discrimination. In one study pertaining to Latino and African American junior high, high school and college students, researchers found that for minority students, parents may play a particularly important role (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, Lopez, & Dunbar, 1995). Minority students reported feeling barriers they described as "gatekeepers" in which teachers and counselors discouraged them from pursuing university-track courses and instead attempted to enroll them in noncollege tracks (Erickson & Schultz, 1982). These students reported that they perceived their parents as "brokering" them or providing a protective bridge between home and school (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, & Lopez, 1998). In another study in which incarcerated women were interviewed, researchers sought to analyze childhood trauma and the effects in adulthood. Minority females, particularly African Americans, believed that educators ignored signs of abuse and even reported that

they perceived teachers as being hostile and racist. Many perceived these attitudes from their educators as indicating that it was likely that they would not receive help with their difficulties and therefore did not perceive themselves as having a particularly promising future (Gilfus, 1992). Arnold (1995) supports this view, stating that for minority women the existence of parental discord and educational neglect may lead to young women feeling that school is not a viable option. With little education and no marketable skills, he posits that they may resort to prostitution and stealing.

Regarding Latinos and family communication, previous research suggested that due to certain situational variables associated with minority status, we might expect to see more Latino adolescents reporting poor familial communication and parental school support. Quicker's (1983) study focusing on Hispanic gang members in Los Angeles reported that there are often limited economic opportunities in the barrio which leads to many needs within the family unit going unmet. He believes that as a result, families are becoming more "disintegrated" and typically are not focusing on supporting their children in attaining what we consider culturally emphasized success goals.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of family communication and parental school support on delinquency rates and assess whether differences exist depending on gender or ethnicity. Differences in the manifestation of delinquency will also be explored to assess whether there are gender differences concerning sexual behavior.

### **Research Questions**

1. Is there a relationship between school status (dropout vs. in school) and reports of delinquency?
2. Are there gender differences concerning the effects of family communication and parental school support?
3. Do Hispanics and White non-Hispanics differ in their reported level of family communication and parental school support?
4. Do males and female differ in the type of delinquency they report?
5. Do family communication and parental school support variables predict future occurrences of delinquency?

## CHAPTER II

### Method

#### Participants

A total of 2,621 dropouts and youth still enrolled in school were surveyed from three school districts in the southwestern region of the United States and included individuals from an urban population (400,000), a mid-sized community (90,000), and a small community (30,000). Regarding the Family Communication scale and Parental School Support scale, a subset of 576 participants completed these items. These respondents included 314 females and 262 males, with 276 individuals identifying themselves as White non-Hispanic and 300 identified as Hispanic. The mean age for these individuals = 16.59,  $SD = 1.12$ . The Sexual Activity scale was completed by 1081 respondents. These participants included 529 females and 552 males. Respondents included 339 individuals identifying themselves as White non-Hispanics and 742 identifying as Hispanic. The mean age for these respondents = 20.89,  $SD = 1.6$ . Dropouts were defined as 7th - 12th graders with a school-reported period of truancy lasting one month or longer and who did not contact the school following this period. Control students were randomly selected from the dropout's school and were matched on ethnicity, grade and gender. These control students were generally in good academic standing. Due to missing data and inconsistent responses, some individuals were deleted from the total sample, resulting in unequal cell sizes. Longitudinal data was obtained

over a five-year span and changes and consistencies in delinquent behavior were analyzed.

Participation was voluntary for all three groups and completion of the survey was conducted anonymously. Dropouts were paid \$20 for their participation while students in school were paid \$10 because they were able to fill out the survey at school and not on their own time.

### Survey

The complete survey that included the questions used in the study included self-report questions on psychosocial variables, family factors, and a wide range of delinquent behaviors. Oetting & Beauvais (1990) found self-report of delinquent behaviors to be a valid and reliable means of measurement.

### Measures Used in the Study

*General Information.* Ethnicity, age, sex, marital status, school status (e.g. dropout, at-risk, control), parents' marital status, and family living conditions (e.g. mother/father living at home) were obtained from individual's self-reports.

*Conviction.* Each participant was also questioned as to whether he/she had been convicted of any type of delinquency.

*Vandalism.* The five items in the Vandalism scale measured a range of self-reported delinquent acts. Seriousness of the acts ranged from slashing tires, damaging school property on purpose, damaging property at work on purpose, spray painting a name or something on a building, to setting fire to someone's property. The items in the scale were tested for internal consistency using the procedure described by Cronbach (1951). The alpha coefficient was .69.

***Intrusion.*** The two items utilized in the Intrusion scale assessed whether the participant had engaged in an act of uninvited intrusion. The items included intrusion on to someone's property or intrusion into a vehicle. The reliability coefficient for this measure was in excess of .59.

***Theft.*** The five items in this measure also included a range of acts ranging in severity. Items ranged from stealing candy to stealing a car for joyriding. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .74.

***Delinquency.*** All of the above mentioned items were combined in a composite delinquency scale. The reliability coefficient for this scale was .87.

***Sexual Activity.*** The Sexual Activity scale measures the sexual activity of the respondent. Items range from assessing the number of sexual activities, age of activities and specific sexual acts engaged in and the frequency (e.g. anal intercourse, oral sex, sexual intercourse). Examples of items include "How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time?", "During your life, with how many people have you had oral sex?". Items were taken from the scale, but a composite scale was not used due to the questions pertaining to frequency. It should be noted that the Sexual Activity scale could not be analyzed with the Parental School Support and Family Communication scales due to the fact that the questions which were sexual in nature were not administered until the participant reached at least 18 years of age. Given that the Parental School Support and Family Communication scales did not have an age restriction, they were administered at an earlier year than the items with sexual content.

***Parental School Support.*** This six item scaled measures the involvement of parents in school activities and events. Items include parents attending school events

(e.g. music programs, sports events, etc.), parents attending scholastic functions (e.g. PTA meetings, back to school night, etc.), and parents' interest in the school environment. These items were tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's procedures and found to have an alpha in excess of .92.

*Family Communication.* The Family Communication scale consists of 10 items measuring the level and depth of the family communication. Items assess the youth's perception of emotional support, ability to communicate with parents, parents' willingness to help their child make decisions, and parents' attention to activities and interests in the child's life. Some items could be answered in a yes/no manner, while others were answered on a Likert scale ranging from no parents, not at all, not much, some, and a lot. Items measured on the Likert scale included: How much do your parents pay attention when you talk about your future?, How much do parents pay attention to how you act?, and How much have your parents talked to you about the dangers of school? This measure had an alpha of .73.

### Procedure

Subjects and their parents were contacted by bilingual field workers employed by the school district. Interested subjects over the age of 18 signed consent forms. If the individual was under 18 years old, parents were contacted and written parental consent was obtained. This method led to low rates of refusal, with only 4-6% of the dropout group and 5-8% of the student group refusing. Those that did refuse were replaced by others in the sampling pool that matched their characteristics.

Once informed consent was obtained, arrangements were made regarding the administration of the survey. Students obtained the survey in a private room at the school

and dropouts completed the survey either in the same room or at another public building, such as the library. Participants generally received \$10-25 for completion of the survey with some individuals receiving higher amounts due to greater travel and difficulty in arranging for the survey. The administrator directed the participants in the completion of the survey and answered general questions but did not see the participant responses. Once the survey was completed, the participant placed it in a large envelope and personally sealed it. Based on the participant's decision, the completed survey was either mailed to the research office by the survey administrator or mutually by the participant and the administrator. Given that the administrator did not have access to the completed surveys, this method assured confidentiality.

The accuracy and reliability of the data was assured with the execution of 40 computer checks for inconsistency or exaggeration (e.g. endorsement of a non-existent drug, or claiming daily use of multiple drugs). Of the completed surveys, only 2% failed either review and those that did fail were removed from the final sample.

## CHAPTER III

### Results

#### Overview of Analyses

In the following analysis, each nominal variable of interest was entered into a backward stepwise logistic regression to determine any significant variables or interactions in the prediction of delinquent behavior. This statistical approach entails entering all of the variables of interest into a regression model. The variables that remain in the model, after the statistically insignificant variables have dropped out, are analyzed to determine the degree to which the variable of interest can predict a certain outcome. This type of statistical analysis was chosen because it is considered a useful and effective analysis that builds models sequentially and allows for the analysis of a variety of models which might not otherwise be examined with the use of other statistical techniques (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 1989). Analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted in selected analyses to determine the degree to which the factor of interest accounted for variance in differing situations.

#### School Status and Delinquency

Initially, analysis was conducted to examine whether school status (i.e. in school versus dropout) differentially predicted involvement in delinquent behaviors. The findings indicate that dropouts are 2.44 times more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors than those students enrolled in school,  $p < .000$  (see Table 1). This initial

delinquency measure consisted of questions pertaining to acts of theft, intrusion, vandalism, and convictions for delinquent behavior. To determine whether there were differences in the type of delinquent acts that were committed by dropouts, further analyses were conducted to better differentiate these behaviors. Dropouts were 2.39 times more likely to commit a theft compared to their in school peers, 1.68 times more likely to endorse an act of intrusion, and 2.14 times more likely to commit vandalism,  $p$ 's  $\leq .001$ . Analysis also indicated that individuals described as dropouts were 3.70 times more likely to have been convicted for a delinquent act than their in school peers,  $p < .000$ .

#### Gender as Predictor of Delinquent Behavior

Gender was entered initially into each stepwise logistic regression, and not found to have any significant interactions with the analyzed variables (e.g. family communication, parental school support, and ethnicity). Males were found to be 1.46 times more likely to commit a delinquent act than their female peers. Further analyses indicated the following increased likelihood of committing each of the following acts: 1.33 for theft, 2.30 for vandalism, and 2.28 for conviction of a delinquent act,  $p$ 's  $\leq .05$ . Gender was not a significant predictor of committing an act of intrusion.

#### Ethnicity as a Predictor of Delinquency

Ethnicity was entered initially into each stepwise logistic regression, and not found to have any significant interactions with the analyzed variables (e.g. family communication, parental school support, and gender). On the overall measure of delinquency, Latino individuals were 1.38 times more likely to engage in a delinquent behavior than their White Non-Hispanic peers,  $p < .05$ . Further analyses revealed that in

regard to the vandalism, theft, and intrusion scales, there were no significant effects concerning ethnicity. On the conviction scale, Hispanics were 1.48 times more likely to be convicted of a delinquent act than their White Non-Hispanics peers,  $p \leq .05$ .

### Family Communication and Delinquency

Family Communication was measured on a scale assessing level of family communication on 10 items measured on a likert scale ranging from 1-4. The possible range of scores that could be obtained ranged from 10 - 40 with below 10 indicating a failure in following directions and 40 indicating full endorsement of all items. In their perceptions of family communication levels, Latinos ( $M = 32.77$ ,  $SD = 6.72$ ) and White non-Hispanics ( $M = 32.59$ ,  $SD = 6.65$ ) did not differ significantly. Regarding the relationship between delinquency, gender, ethnicity and family communication, no significant interactions were found. On measures of family communication, a one-point deduction between participants indicated a 1.10 times greater likelihood of committing an act of delinquency. Further analysis was conducted to differentiate the likelihood of various types of delinquency. Based on the family communication scale, for each point reduction in the individual's score, an individual is 1.07 times more likely to commit an act of theft,  $p \leq .000$ . Family communication was also found to be associated with the following, each point reduction in the individual's score indicating a 1.08 times greater likelihood of perpetrating an act of intrusion and a 1.07 times greater likelihood of committing an act of theft,  $p's \leq .000$ . Individual's likelihood of conviction for a delinquent act was also analyzed. Family communication was related to conviction rates with each point reduction signifying a 1.05 times greater likelihood of conviction,  $p \leq .000$ .

### Parental School Support and Delinquency

Parental school support was measured on a scale assessing level of perceived school support from the child's perspective. The scale utilized 6 items that were measured on a likert scale ranging from 1-4. The possible range of scores that could be obtained ranged from 6- 24 with scores below 6 indicating a failure in following directions and 24 indicating full endorsement of all items. On the overall measure of parental school support, there was no significant difference between Hispanics ( $M = 16.76, SD = 3.71$ ) and White non-Hispanic ( $M = 17.16, SD = 3.34$ ) ratings. Regarding the overall measure of delinquency, both gender and the interactions between gender, ethnicity and parental school support were not found to be significant. However, parental school support was found to predict delinquency. With a maximum rating score of 24, each point decrease in the rating score indicated a 1.19 greater likelihood of committing an act of delinquency,  $p \leq .000$ . On the measure of parental school support, a one point drop resulted in the following increased likelihood of committing each of the following acts: 1.15 for theft, 1.14 for intrusion, and 1.17 for vandalism,  $p$ 's  $\leq .000$ . Additionally, a point decrease in the total rating score of school support indicates a 1.14 times greater likelihood of being convicted for a crime,  $p \leq .000$ .

### Gender, School Status, and Ethnic Differences in Sexual Behavior

The sexual activity variables were entered in a stepwise logistic regression and included ethnicity (e.g. White Non-Hispanic or Hispanic), gender, and academic status (e.g. dropout or in-school status).

Regarding endorsement of having engaged in any type of sexual activity (e.g. intercourse, anal sex, and oral sex), sexual intercourse in particular, or oral sex there were

no significant differences between males and females. Ethnicity was significant, with Hispanics 1.52 times more likely to report having engaged in sex than their White non-Hispanic peers,  $p \leq .001$ ,  $R^2 = .003$ . Regarding the mean number of sexual partners that the participants reported they had engaged in either oral or anal sex, there also did not appear to be any significant differences.

When questioned about their history of engaging in anal sex, there was a significant difference pertaining to gender only,  $p < .05$ . Males were found to be 1.28 times more likely to engage in anal sex than their female counterparts.

There was also a significant difference between males and females reported mean number of sexual partners (e.g. including oral and anal sex and sexual intercourse) difference with males ( $M = 8.29$ ) reporting a higher number than females ( $M = 4.25$ ),  $p \leq .000$ ,  $R^2 = .021$ . Ethnicity did not appear to be significant. However, using the experimental method of ANOVA, results indicated a significant interaction between ethnicity and gender,  $p \leq .10$ ,  $R^2 = .006$ . Regarding the age at which these individuals engaged in the sexual behavior, males and females reported a significant difference. The mean age at which participants began engaging in any type of sexual behavior differed between males ( $M = 14.66$ ) and females ( $M = 15.54$ ),  $p \leq .000$ . The mean age at which sexual intercourse began also differed, with males ( $M = 14.80$ ) engaging at an earlier age than females ( $M = 15.56$ ),  $p \leq .000$ . The reported age at which participants began engaging in oral sex also differed, males ( $M = 16.09$ ) endorsed engaging at an earlier age than females ( $M = 16.90$ ),  $p \leq .000$ . Ethnicity was not found to be significant. However, there was a small, yet significant interaction regarding ethnicity and gender,  $p \leq .000$ ,  $R^2 = .011$ .

**Table 1. Variables Associated with Overall Delinquency Scale**

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<u>Variable</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	<u>95% CI</u>	<u>P's ≤</u>
Males	1.46*	1.13 - 1.79	.05
Hispanic	1.38*	1.08 - 1.68	.05
Parental School Support	1.19**	1.14 - 1.24	.000
Family Communication	1.10**	1.08 - 1.12	.000
Dropout	2.44*	2.11 - 2.77	.000

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\* Indicates that endorsement of the item predicts a greater likelihood of delinquency

\*\* Each point reduction in the scale results in a greater likelihood of delinquency

**Table 2. Variables Associated with Theft**

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<u>Variable</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	<u>95% CI</u>	<u>P's ≤</u>
Male	1.33*	1.03 - 1.63	.10
Parental School Support	1.15**	1.11 - 1.19	.000
Family Communication	1.07**	1.06 - 1.10	.000
Dropout	2.39*	2.07 - 2.70	.000

---

\* Indicates that endorsement of the item predicts a greater likelihood of delinquency

\*\* Each point reduction in the scale results in a greater likelihood of delinquency

**Table 3. Variables Associated with Intrusion**

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<u>Variable</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	<u>95% CI</u>	<u>P's ≤</u>
Parental School Support	1.14**	1.09 - 1.19	.000
Family Communication	1.08**	1.05 - 1.11	.000
Dropout	1.68*	1.37 - 1.99	.001

---

\* Indicates that endorsement of the item predicts a greater likelihood of delinquency

\*\* Each point reduction in the scale results in a greater likelihood of delinquency

**Table 4. Variables Associated with Conviction**

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<u>Variable</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	<u>95% CI</u>	<u>P's ≤</u>
Males	2.28*	1.91 - 2.65	.000
Hispanic	1.48*	1.11 - 1.85	.05
Parental School Support	1.14**	1.10 - 1.18	.000
Family Communication	1.05**	1.03 - 1.07	.000
Dropout	3.70*	3.34 - 4.06	.000

---

\* Indicates that endorsement of the item predicts a greater likelihood of delinquency

\*\* Each point reduction in the scale results in a greater likelihood of delinquency

**Table 5. Variables Associated with Vandalism**

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<u>Variable</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	<u>95% CI</u>	<u>P's ≤</u>
Males	2.30*	1.91 - 2.68	.000
Parental School Support	1.17**	1.14 - 1.20	.000
Family Communication	1.06**	1.04 - 1.08	.000
Dropout	2.14*	1.79 - 2.49	.000

---

\* Indicates that endorsement of the item predicts a greater likelihood of delinquency

\*\* Each point reduction in the scale results in a greater likelihood of delinquency

**Table 6. Gender Differences in Age of Initiation of Sexual Behavior**

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	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>	<u>Mean Difference</u>	<u>Confidence Intervals**</u>	<u>R<sup>2</sup></u>
Sexual behavior*	14.62	15.54	.8896	.606 - 1.173	.03
Intercourse	14.80	15.56	.7594	.480 - 1.038	.03
Oral Sex	16.09	16.91	.8261	.509 - 1.143	.03

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\* Sexual behavior includes oral sex, anal sex, and sexual intercourse

\*\* 95% Confidence Interval based on Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

## CHAPTER IV

### Discussion

**This study examined variables associated with delinquency and sexual behavior in both Hispanic and White-non-Hispanic adolescents. The study utilized information from a large data set and included various measures of delinquency and different types of sexual behavior. The variety of questions utilized in the measure allowed for differentiation between several types of delinquency and variations in endorsement of these behaviors in addition to dichotomous variables such as drop out status versus in school status. Findings suggest that there is a significant difference regarding delinquent acts committed by males and females, with males consistently endorsing a greater number of all types of delinquency.**

**Studies that assess sexual behavior in females are few, often examining small samples and possessing limitations in the types of questions asked and ages of participants examined. Additionally, the majority of research has examined White non-Hispanic populations or ethnic groups other than Latinas. Findings suggest that there is not a significant difference between Hispanics and White non-Hispanics in the endorsement of sexual behavior. However, on all measures of sexual behavior, males endorsed greater activity beginning at an earlier age.**

**A strength of this study was the access to large samples of both White non-Hispanics and Hispanics in the study of family communication, parental school support,**

delinquency, and sexual behavior. Research regarding adolescents' perceptions of communication with their parents and parents' perceived support regarding education are also scarce. Again, the ability to analyze this variable with both Hispanics and White non-Hispanics is an asset of this study. While significant differences between ethnic groups were not found, results suggest that parental school support and family communication are significant variables associated with delinquent behaviors. Implications of the significance of these variables will be discussed further.

#### Limitations of the Study

Results should be discussed only after acknowledging the study's limitations. One such limitation concerns the types of delinquency measured. There are a number of types of delinquency that were not assessed (e.g. violent offenses, status offenders). While the analysis of the parental school support and family communication variables pertaining to violent behavior (e.g. murder, rape) would be useful and interesting, there were severe limitations regarding sample size. The delinquent behaviors chosen for analysis were believed to occur in a greater number of adolescents and therefore may be more applicable to a greater number of individuals.

Another limitation pertains to the use of separate databases regarding delinquent behaviors and sexual behaviors. The participants for the sexual behavior questionnaire were required to be at least 18 years of age. For this reason, the younger adolescents who answered the delinquency questions were not the same individuals questioned about sexual behavior. Further analysis that allows for longitudinal measures with individuals beginning in early adolescents to late adolescence (e.g. 18 and older) may provide us with information regarding sexual behavior in relation to other types of delinquency.

**School Status and Delinquency.** School status appeared to be a consistent predicting variable across all types of delinquency. This finding supports the strain theory hypothesis which posits that those that are not successful in traditional avenues (e.g. educational system) typically have to resolve this strain through less desirable actions (Merton, 1938). Unfortunately, this finding suggests that the failure to complete school may begin a vicious cycle for the adolescent. They appear to not only have limited opportunities due to their lack of education, but these educational limitations appear to exacerbate their problems and increase the likelihood of becoming involved in illicit, often illegal activities (Agnew & Brezina, 1997). While we are unable to conclusively state whether the delinquent behavior is the cause of withdrawal from school or delinquency is a result of no longer being involved in school, it appears that this is an area of research worthy of further analysis.

**Family Communication.** One of the arguments discussed earlier regarded whether delinquency may be a product of under-involvement or over-involvement by parents. Findings suggest that delinquency only appears to be related to families lacking in communication, not those that endorse high levels of communication. This is contrary to the argument of Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle (1993) who found that either end of the family “cohesion” continuum could lead to delinquent behavior. Instead, data shows that the greater the endorsement of family communication, the less likely the individual is to engage in all types of reviewed delinquent behavior. The positive effects of family communication regarding prevention of delinquent behavior may be a result of adolescents feeling that they have someone who is concerned about their lives, problems, and their futures. Those adolescents that feel that their families are not invested in their

lives may feel that if their parents do not care about their life, who possibly could? These youth also may not be receiving feedback concerning what types of behaviors are acceptable and which are likely to get them into trouble. While we may perceive that adolescents know that these types of delinquent behaviors are not acceptable, this may not be the case. If the main source of feedback that these youth are exposed to is their peer's opinions rather than their family's, the adolescent's best interest regarding their future may not be the messages they are receiving.

Another possible implication of the student feeling that their parents are not interested in their lives, is that the student may find that the only time that their parents do want to communicate is when the adolescent is in trouble. From a learning perspective, the student may find that this type of reinforcement (e.g. parents communicating with them about their lives) only occurs when they are in trouble and this may provide them with an incentive to engage in delinquency. The implication that this theory would provide is that parents should show interest consistently when the child is acting in a positive way. This, of course, requires a greater time commitment from parents regarding spending time with their child. But, if the alternative is negative communication with the child once they have engaged in delinquency, prevention may be more desirable.

These findings support intervening with family support services which aide the family in providing resources for their child during their development rather than once the family is in crisis. This view is supported by Rankin & Wells (1996) who believe that by providing families with resources (e.g. informational resources, educational programs, and support groups) during their child's development, there is a greater chance of avoiding problems which result from familial discord.

**Parental School Support.** An additional finding regarding delinquency was the importance of perceived parental school support. Previous research found that parent's support is important in the adolescents academic and social development (Lewis, 1971), but did not specifically analyze parents' perceived support regarding academics in particular. Findings suggest that whether or not adolescents view their parents as supporting academic endeavors plays an important role in predicting the likelihood of acting out. Given that we do not typically view academic success and delinquency as being collaborative, it is not surprising that in families where the adolescent's academic endeavors are supported, delinquency declines. Dornbusch, Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, Chen's (1990) arguments support the impact of parent's support since they view adolescence as a time when individual needs and parental expectations are being negotiated. It appears reasonable to hypothesize that if the individual does not know that academic success is the expectation and are not supported by their parents in this endeavor, the attempt to meet this need may be minimized or lost in their negotiations.

Similar to the findings with family communication, we see that parental school support is possibly an untapped preventative strategy for delinquency. Adolescents low endorsement of parental school support appears to indicate that academic success as a priority is not a message that is being heard as clear and strong as we may prefer (e.g. mean for parental school support,  $M = 16.92$  ). One possibility is that parents may feel that the goal of educational success is implicit and does not need to be addressed. Discussion of academics may be similar to topics such as sex, drug use, and peer pressure, where parents believe children know and do not need a lecture. Unfortunately, it

is likely that we will see the same problems associated with these topics, with peers shaping the adolescent's views rather than parents.

In conclusion, it appears that education of parents in the importance of the messages they send regarding academic endeavors is important and lacking. Research has shown that teachers can be effective in determining those children that may have academic problems and are at-risk for anti-social behavior (Kuppersmidt & Patterson, 1991). Therefore, the goal appears to be to share these concerns with the parents before problems occur and promote parent's communicating the importance of schooling and supporting their endeavors. Intervening at an early stage by having the family become involved, may be a more useful and cost-effective method of addressing the delinquency problem.

Latinos, Parental School Support and Family Communication. One possibility addressed in the review of the literature pertained to a difference we might expect to see regarding less parental school support in the Latino population. Quicker (1983) argued that due to limited economic opportunities in this population, many needs within the family unit might go unmet. In particular, families may not focus on supporting their children in attaining what we consider culturally emphasized success goals. This hypothesis did not appear to be true. While there was not a difference between ethnic groups, the implications of this low level of parental support may have greater impact in the Hispanic adolescent's development given that there may not be as many other sources of scholastic support as White non-Hispanics may have. Given that minority adolescents may face an additional barrier in their educational pursuit, discrimination, the support from their parents may play a magnified role in their academic success (Gilfus, 1992;

Arnold, 1995). While this study did not find that parental school support was a greater factor in predicting delinquency for Mexican American adolescents than their White Non-Hispanic peers, the question of what type of influence parental school support had on academic success was not addressed. It appears that this perceived academic support at least allows adolescents to have a greater chance of staying out of trouble and in school. But a further research question may be whether parental school support provides a greater impetus for academic success in minority adolescents than their non-minority peers. Since there may be more of a societal expectation for failure regarding minority adolescents, this message from their parents may be the only voice of hope and confidence these individuals hear.

Given that support from parents may deter delinquent behavior, lower levels of delinquency, and reduce psychological distress in adolescents (Hickel, K. & Newcomb, M.D., 1998), we know that parental school support is an important issue. Unfortunately, while we have found that Mexican American parents typically value academic success and support their children academically, they are often unable to assist them with their schoolwork due to the lack of skills or knowledge that are needed (Okagaki, Frensch, & Gordon, 1995). Rankin & Wells (1996) believe that one way to reduce this disadvantage may be to provide more remedial services to these families. These may include psycho-education, which provides the parents information about how to support their children academically. Also, by promoting increased interaction with the school, parents may understand what topics are being taught to their children and how they may aide in the process. Volunteer services which allow tutors and Spanish-speaking individuals to come

into the home and model the appropriate support and bridge a gap between school and home may also allow parents greater understanding of the needs of the student.

**Females and Sexual Delinquency.** Research in the area of female delinquency is sparse and inconclusive. Men and women appear to share some similar reasons for committing crimes, they are both likely to be from low socioeconomic status, have difficulty with school, and come from disruptive or violent households (Chesney-Lind, 1997). But there are often added variables that affect girls differently in their development and may contribute to different ways of acting out in delinquent ways. Females encounter difficulties with sexual abuse, sexual assault, dating violence, unwanted pregnancies, and adolescent motherhood. Given that families are often the source of the above mentioned problems along with other difficulties faced by females, solutions that hope to prevent delinquency need to realize the great impact that families may possess.

One goal of this research was to address the possibility that female delinquency may not be manifesting in ways that we expect to see from males. By recognizing that female and male delinquency may be different, we may realize that our historical approach in addressing delinquency may be antiquated and misguided. Traditionally, research has analyzed male delinquency and set up strategies to address male delinquency, then transferred those interventions to females.

One facet that should be addressed initially in the discussion of the findings, is that sexual activity was placed with other scales of delinquency, but not because there is a belief that sexual activity equates with delinquency. Previous research has typically viewed sexuality in women different than in men. Historically, women who engaged in

intercourse, even when in a monogamous relationship were characterized as engaging in “sexual misconduct” in the judicial and reformatory realms, while this label did not appear for males (Odem & Schlossman, 1991). While there is literature that addresses the discrepancies in society’s views of sexual activity for males and females, the main point is that while sexual activity does not equal sexual misconduct, there is research suggesting that sexual activity may be the “gateway” to other delinquent activities. Also, based on Mazur’s (1989) affiliation motivation theory, it is important to establish whether different motivations in the strain theory may be leading to different types of delinquency.

The results suggest that males were more likely to commit all types of delinquency (e.g. vandalism, theft) which is consistent with most delinquency research. However, one finding which may warrant further analysis is the fact that males and females endorsement of sexual behavior was not as different as one might expect, given males’ over-representation in all other areas of delinquency. Males and females did not differ significantly in their endorsement of engaging in sexual intercourse and oral sex. This measure simply addressed whether or not the participant had engaged in the behavior. The only sexual activity that varied was anal sex in which males were significantly higher than females. Regarding age of initiation and numbers of partners, the consensus appears that males have more partners and begin earlier. Even with these significant differences, the greatest amount of variability that was accounted for through gender was 3%.

It appears that this is one area of behavior that females do not look too different from males. Given that females are so underrepresented in traditional definitions of delinquency, but equal in areas of sexual behavior, further exploration is warranted.

Mazur's (1989) interpretation of the strain theory for females states that females place greater emphasis on relationships, which may lead females to act out in behaviors related to "interpersonal relationships". While this may be true, it leads us to believe that interpersonal relationships may play a greater role in prevention of delinquency for females. If this is true, one way to capitalize on this phenomenon is to establish programs of intervention that address female's relationships with their families.

### Future Directions

For all measures, we find that communication and messages that parents send play an important role in the adolescent's development and tendency to engage in delinquency. By implementing programs, which provide parents with information that will aid them in their communication and emphasizing education, we may be able to prevent acts of delinquency.

Outcome studies which assess different methods of intervention (e.g. group parenting courses, school initiated endeavors, etc.) may provide us with the most efficient methods of prevention and allow us to determine whether there are cultural or gender differences which must be addressed in planning of programs. For example, there may be different needs within families in which the student is the first family member to attend school or for families in which English is not the primary language. Also, studies may need to be conducted on females for female interventions rather than taking interventions targeted and researched on males and applying them to female issues.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **General Information**

1. How old are you?
2. Sex?
3. Are you single?
4. Do you have any children?
5. Did you graduate from high school?
6. If no, last grade completed?
7. Original group identification (At risk, Control, Dropout)?
8. Ethnicity?
9. School GPA?
10. Are your parents divorced?
11. Does your father live at home with you?
12. Does your mother live at home with you?

## **Family Communication**

1. Do your parents care about what you do?
2. Do you get emotional help and support you need from your parents?
3. Do you feel that you can talk about your problems with your parents?
4. Are your parents willing to help you make decisions?
5. How much do your parents pay attention when you talk about:  
Doing the right thing?
6. How much do your parents pay attention when you talk about:  
Your Future?
7. How much do your parents pay attention when you talk about:  
Your Friends?
8. How much do your parents pay attention when you talk about:  
Your boyfriends/girlfriends?
9. How much do your parents pay attention to:  
How you act?
10. How much do your parents pay attention to:  
What you wear?

## **Intrusion Scale**

1. **Have you ever broken into a car?**
2. **Have you gone into some house or building when you weren't supposed to be there?**

## **Parental School Support**

1. Did your parents know what was going on at school?
2. Did your parents go to school events like music programs, sports events, etc.?
3. Did your parents go to school meetings like PTA, back to school night, etc.?
4. In talking about school, how much do your parents pay attention?
5. How much do you talk to your parents about school?
6. How much do your parents talk about school?

## **Theft Delinquency Scale**

1. Stolen candy from a store?
2. Stolen something worth less than \$50?
3. Taken something from a store without paying for it?
4. Stolen a bicycle?
5. Taken a car, without permission of the owner, that didn't belong to someone in your family (joyriding)?

## **Vandalism Delinquency Scale**

1. Damaged school property on purpose?
2. Damaged property at work on purpose?
3. Spray-painted a name or something on a building?
4. Slashed tires?
5. Set fire to someone's property?

## **Sexual Activity Scale**

1. Have you ever had sexual intercourse?
2. Have you ever had anal intercourse?
3. Have you ever engaged in oral sex?
4. How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time?
5. How old were you when you had anal intercourse for the first time?
6. How old were you when you had oral sex for the first time?
7. During your life, with how many people have you had sexual intercourse?
8. During your life, with how many people have you had anal intercourse?
9. During your life, with how many people have you had oral sex?