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Relations Among Victimization, Witnessing, and Perpetration of Aggression: Impact of Gender Among Youth Offenders

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Abstract

The participants included 251 (158 males; 93 females) youth offenders who were arrested and incarcerated in a juvenile facility in the Midwest United States. The aims were to assess (a) how often they were a victim, a witness, and/or a perpetrator of social aggression, simple assault, and aggravated assault during the past year; (b) to examine whether exposure (either witness or victim or both) predicted committing three types of aggressive behaviors; and (c) to assess the impact of gender among the youth offenders. Differential predictability models were utilized to assess gender differences. The findings revealed that gender was an important predictor. For example, females reported higher rates of being a witness, a victim, and a perpetrator of social aggression than did males. Moreover, female offenders committed simple assault more often than males and males committed aggravated assault more often than females. The general results suggest that it is important to examine the various forms of aggression, and exposure, as well as how gender affects these relationships.

Keywords

gender; juvenile crimes; witness; victim; youth offenders

The United States experienced a 10% drop in the number of juvenile arrests between 2011 and 2012. Nonetheless, the total number was still unacceptably high in 2012 at 1,319,700 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). Furthermore, studies have found that adolescents are twice as likely to be victims of violent crimes compared with adults (Baum, 2005), and nearly twice as likely to be a witness to violent crimes compared with children (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009). This suggests that youth at this age period may be particularly at risk given that research has found that exposure to violence can increase the likelihood of criminal offending (e.g., Jennings, Higgins, Tewksbury, Gover, & Piquero, 2010; Jennings, Piquero, & Reingle, 2012; Tisak, Wichorek, & Tisak, 2011). The current study was designed to investigate the interrelations between exposure to aggression and

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being a perpetrator of aggression among youth offenders. In addition to leading to criminal activity, research has demonstrated that exposure to aggression is associated with other negative consequences to the youth, which will be discussed below. Likewise, it is important to distinguish between the type of exposure to aggression (i.e., being a witness and/or victim) and the form of aggression (e.g., physical or social) in which one is exposed (e.g., Tisak et al., 2011).

Victimization

Past research shows that children who have been victims of aggression experience mental health problems (Schwartz, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2014), such as suicidal ideation (Potard et al., 2014) and depressive symptoms (Troop-Gordon, Rudolph, Sugimura, & Little, 2014). Awareness of one's own victimization is also an important factor in predicting mental health outcomes. That is, when children are aware of their own victimization, this may result in feelings of helplessness and hopelessness (Gottheil & Dubow, 2001). Moreover, victimization has been found to be a predictor of perpetration of aggression (Ostrov, 2010; Ostrov & Godleski, 2013; Tisak et al., 2011; Williford, Brisson, Bender, Jenson, & Forrest-Bank, 2011). For instance, Tisak and colleagues (2011) reported that being a victim of social aggression predicted committing social aggression and committing simple assault increased as being victimized by simple assault increased. Furthermore, it has been found that peer victimization predicts social alienation, which leads to affiliation with deviant peers (Rudolph et al., 2014), although this may only be true for males than for females (Daigle, Cullen, & Wright, 2007).

As noted above, there is a correspondence between being a victim of aggression and also being a perpetrator (see Jennings et al., 2012 for an extensive review, based on more than five decades of research). Most relevant to the current research was their reporting that many of these studies demonstrated a strong relationship between victimization and delinquency (Chang, Chen, & Brownson, 2003; Fagan, Piper, & Cheng, 1987; Lauritsen & Quinet, 1995). These findings are consistent with more recent longitudinal data (e.g., Dubow, Huesmann, Boxer, & Smith, 2014) demonstrating that being a victim of aggression during adolescence predicted becoming a criminal offender by middle adulthood.

However, research has shown that the impact of victimization may differentially predict aggression and delinquency by gender. For instance, in a study of non-adjudicated, urban middle-aged school children, Sullivan, Farrell, and Kliewer (2006) found that physical victimization, being hit or kicked by another child, for example, predicted subsequent self-reports of delinquency, but only for males. In contrast, females who were victims of physical aggression were not more likely to report delinquent behaviors after exposure to aggression. These findings have been replicated in adjudicated samples as well (Asscher, van der Put, & Stams, 2015). This may be due to the increased likelihood of males being victims of physical aggression. That is, other studies have found that, in terms of direct aggression, such as physical aggression, males are much more likely to be victimized than females, even though direct victimization occurs only half as much as indirect aggression, or social aggression, of which females are more likely to be victims (Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010). In other words, it seems that rates of victimization appear to vary by the type

of aggression and by gender. Although physical aggression is directed significantly more toward males, research has shown that both males and females commit social aggression (Mawby, 1980; Tisak et al., 2011). However, the negative results appear to be worse for females than males (Goldstein & Tisak, 2004). Thus, being a victim of social aggression, *in general*, increases the odds of perpetration (Tisak et al., 2011).

Finally, Daigle et al. (2007) found that the mechanisms differed by gender (under the *gender-specificity debate*). This may imply that, even when no gender differences seem apparent in the rates of victimization and delinquency, the causal pathway going from being a victim to choosing to offend may involve different mechanisms entirely, mechanisms which center on gender socialization. Daigle and colleagues (2007) compared this model with other, more established theories of delinquency in a large national sample of adolescents. They reported that although males tended to report greater victimization than females, victimization was a stronger predictor of subsequent perpetration for females. However, this finding only held when examining predictors of violent offenses. When examining predictors of non-violent delinquency, victimization was not a significant predictor for either gender, which again supports other research that aggression/violence type needs to be considered (Caprara et al., 2013; Caprara et al., 2014; Paciello, Fida, Tramontano, Lupinetti, & Caprara, 2008; Tisak & Jankowski, 1996; Tisak et al., 2011).

In general, findings regarding victimization and delinquency are mixed. Although some studies have found that the type of victimization is most important in predicting gender differences in offending (Sullivan et al., 2006; Tisak et al., 2011), others have found no differences (Mawby, 1980) or make strong arguments disputing findings of gender differences (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010). Furthermore, although there exist strong arguments for gender-specificity in theory development, the findings presented by Daigle and colleagues (2007) refute the feministic perspective and support the claim for consideration of victimization for both genders. In contrast, other studies have shown that victimization leads to greater aggression for females, but not males (Calvete & Orue, 2013).

Pertaining to victimization in general, however, Farrell Mehari, Kramer-Kuhn, and Goncy (2014), as well as Calvete and Orue (2013) have noted that being a victim to violence is a weaker predictor of subsequent aggression than is being a witness to violence. Nonetheless, Tisak et al. (2011) found in their national study that victimization of specific types of aggression predicted committing those types of aggression. For example, the authors reported that being victimized by social aggression predicted committing social aggression. It is important to note that these studies were conducted on non-adjudicated samples. Therefore, the current examination of victimization within an adjudicated sample is necessary to see whether these relations hold across types of aggression and offending.

Witnessing

Moffitt (1993) suggested that adolescents may begin developing aggressive behaviors through witnessing alone. Recent has shown that witnessing social peer aggression relates to increased acceptance of these behaviors and increased susceptibility to peer influence (You & Bellmore, 2014). Moreover, witnessing peer aggression was related to externalizing

behaviors and an increase in antisocial behavior, including delinquency (Fiegelman, Howard, Xiaoming, & Cross, 2000; Overstreet, 2000; Tisak et al., 2011). Therefore, extending from Moffitt (1993) witnessing peers' aggression may normalize the behavior or promote the view that aggression is acceptable and even advantageous (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). More recent studies have found that this relationship may be bidirectional. Farrell et al. (2014) conducted a multi-level longitudinal study and found that being a witness to violence at Wave 1 predicted physical aggression at Wave 2. Moreover, they reported that physical aggression at Wave 1 predicted witnessing violence at Wave 2. These relations may provide further support for Moffitt's theory and previous studies (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000; Tisak et al., 2011), whereby witnessing violence and committing physical aggression may be interrelated due to association with delinquent or antisocial peers, or to community factors (Farrell et al., 2014).

However, response to witnessing aggression may be contingent upon one's opinion of the aggressor—as admirable or not (Epstein & Rakosky, 1976), or as an acquaintance or friend (Rogers & Tisak, 1996; Tisak & Tisak, 1996). Furthermore, witnessing aggression could have positive outcomes, as witnessing offers the difficult but important opportunity of being able to help resolve a negative situation. That is, one could encourage the victim and the aggressor to reconcile, or he or she might intervene on another's behalf (Oh & Hazler, 2009), offering the possibility of prosocial outcomes. However, as Tisak and colleagues have noted, this may depend on whether the witnessing participant is non-aggressive (Rogers & Tisak, 1996; Tisak & Tisak, 1996) or a youth offender (Tisak, Lewis, & Jankowski, 1997), giving salience to the current examination of adjudicated youths.

Although males tend to report greater exposure to violence (Brookmeyer, Henrich, & Schwab-Stone, 2005; Wilson, Rosenthal, & Battle, 2007), females are in fact *more* likely to report distress upon being a witness to violence (Wilson et al., 2007) than males. Wilson and colleagues (2007) discussed this counterintuitive finding by highlighting that mere exposure to violence may normalize it, thereby making it less distressing, further supporting previous work by Schwartz and Proctor (2000). That is, it may be that females report greater distress in response to witnessing violence because this is a relatively rare experience for them, whereas males are exposed to this more often and are thus less affected. However, it could be the case that females respond more strongly to witnessing violence regardless of frequency of exposure, which would be in line with work by Daigle et al. (2007) suggesting that gender socialization is associated with differential pathways between exposure and perpetration.

An alternative explanation comes from work on adolescent perspective-taking. Flannery, Marquez, and Smith (2015) found that while males and females are equally capable of attending to and interpreting others' mental states, males tend to ignore this information entirely, whereas females pay special attention to and use this information in their decision making. In the context of the current study, this finding could indicate that females respond more strongly to exposure due to empathizing with victims and internalizing their mental states whereas males tend to ignore others' mental states and would therefore be less affected. Findings from Stickle, Marini, and Thomas (2012) support this point of view with regard to distress among adjudicated youth. Females showed greater levels of both positive

(empathy) and negative (emotional dysregulation) emotionality compared with males, whereas males were higher in callous-unemotional traits. Considering these findings (i.e., Flannery et al., 2015; Stickle et al., 2012), it is likely that, although males are exposed to greater levels of violence, females are more strongly affected by any exposure due to their increased perspective-taking tendencies, and are more likely to respond to this due to greater emotionality.

Perpetration

Longitudinal research has shown that observed aggression during childhood significantly predicts further aggression at a later age, including adulthood (Caprara et al., 2013, 2014; Dubow et al., 2014; Farrington, 1993; Ostrov, 2010; Ostrov & Godleski, 2013; Pouwels & Cillessen, 2013). With high-recidivism rates for violent offenders (Swogger, Walsh, Houston, Cashman-Brown, & Conner, 2010), further research has shown that premeditated, but not impulsive aggression, is a significant predictor of future criminal violence (Swogger, Walsh, Christie, Priddy, & Conner, 2015; Tisak & Jankowski, 1996). This may be because youth who are aggressive toward their peers often begin to enjoy having power over their victims (Besag, 1989). In addition, childhood aggressors develop very little, if any, empathy toward their peers (Rigby, 2004), which might otherwise decrease aggressive tendencies.

Pertaining to differences in offending by gender, past research shows that males are more likely to commit a variety of crimes than are females (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). For example, males are more likely to commit sex crimes and felonies aimed at persons (Asscher et al., 2015), non-felony physical violence (Brookmeyer et al., 2005), as well as general levels of delinquency (Weerman, Bernasco, Bruinsma, & Pauwels, 2016) than females. On the contrary, females, in comparison with males, commit more misdemeanors crimes aimed at persons, rather than felony crimes (Asscher et al., 2015), and less severe levels of aggression (Stickle et al., 2012). Furthermore, males tend to focus their aggression primarily at other males, whereas females will aggress against both genders (Stickle et al., 2012; Tisak, Tisak, & Laurene, 2012).

Current Study

Prior studies have demonstrated that it is important to distinguishing between different levels or seriousness of aggression (Caprara et al., 2013, 2014; Paciello et al., 2008; Tisak et al., 2011). In this study, we will focus on three types of aggression, two of which are considered criminal acts (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). (a) Simple assault is defined as attacks that do not involve the use a dangerous weapon (such as firearm or knife), or result in bodily injury to the victim. (b) Aggravated assault, which is one index of violent crimes, and occurs when an individual's goal is to inflict death or serious bodily harm to another individual with the use of a weapon, such as a knife or firearm. According to the statistical report (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014), juveniles' arrests for aggravated assault consisted of approximately 36,300 or 59% of the arrests for overall violent crimes (including murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, and robbery). An estimated 173,100 were arrested for simple assault. (c) Social aggression, while not a crime, is the use of social

bonds with the intention of weakening these bonds or causing emotional damage (e.g., Goldstein & Tisak, 2004).

The goal of the study was to investigate gender differences between the three types of aggression (simple, aggravated, and social) and the two types of exposure to aggression (witness and victim). Explicitly, are there gender differences in being exposed to or committing aggression/violence? We predicted that females would witness and be victims of social aggression more than males. However, we also expected that males would be exposed to simple and aggravated assault more often than females. Note that the participants rated how often they were exposed to and whether they were a perpetrator of aggression.

In addition, for gender, we further investigated the relationship between exposure and aggressive categories and committing the corresponding type of aggression. Specifically, we investigated whether being a victim/witness of a particular type of aggression predicted committing the same type of aggression/violence. For example, does exposure to simple assault predict committing simple assault? We expected in the case for females that exposure to social aggression would predict committing social aggression. In contrast, for males being exposed to simple assault would predict being perpetrator of simple assault. Furthermore, for males we expected the same relationship to hold with regard to aggravated assault.

Method

Participants

The subjects of this study were youth offenders ($N = 251$) who were arrested and incarcerated in a juvenile facility in an urban Midwestern city of the United States. The ages of the participants ranged from 10.6 to 17.9 years. There were 158 males ($M_{\text{age}} = 15.85$; $SD = 1.56$) and 93 females ($M_{\text{age}} = 15.81$; $SD = 1.35$). The sample was 57% African American, 24% White, and 14% Multiracial. The educational level of the parents ranged from high school graduate to some college (Mothers' $M_{\text{edu}} = 2.58$; $SD = 1.27$; Fathers' $M_{\text{edu}} = 2.25$; $SD = 1.17$). The families were from socioeconomically diverse communities.

Based on their criminal arrest record, which provided data from the first time they were involved in the juvenile delinquent system, we were able to obtain information regarding the participants' arrest history (see Table 1). Specifically, participants could be arrested for more than one type of crime. Therefore, we reported means for each type of crime arrested for, means for total crimes arrested, and means for total arrests. As noted, males were arrested for more crimes than females although there was no gender difference in the total number of arrests. With regard to type of crime, males were arrested more often than females for property crimes, drug crimes, traffic violations, and petty offenses. There were no gender differences for other types of juvenile offenses, including violent and sex crimes.

Procedures

First, we obtained approval by the University's Human Subjects' Review Board for the procedures and measures used in the study. Next, we were provided permission from the Administrator of the Juvenile Detention Center to approach the parents while they were waiting for child–parent visitation hours to begin. We described the project to the parents

and asked their permission for their child to participate in our study. The youth, whose parents provided permission, were invited to listen to the description of the study.

Participants were seen in groups ranging from four to eight participants; groups were separated by gender. Individuals sat at a table in a classroom located in the juvenile detention facility. They were spaced apart so that they could not see the responses of others in the room. After the study was described to them, they were asked whether they wanted to participate. All subjects chose to participate. Each participant was provided with a packet of questionnaires. The first pertained to demographic questions, including age, gender, ethnicity/race, and parents' education. Next, the participants were presented with three sets of questionnaires, which were administered and read to them by a trained graduate researcher. Two of the questionnaires related to exposure to aggression and violence: being a witness, and being a victim. The third questionnaire pertained to being a perpetrator of aggression/violence. Except for the demographic questionnaire, a random order was used in presenting the three other questionnaires.

Measures and Materials

Aggressive—Criminal behaviors—The questionnaires and the items on each of the questionnaires (witness, victim, and perpetration) were derived from previous research (Tisak et al., 2011), which was based on a National U.S. sample of more than 900 adolescents. Three unidimensional scales were developed consisting of social aggression (e.g., gossiping, laughing at a person), simple assault (e.g., beating, kicking), and aggravated assault (e.g., stabbing a person with a knife, shooting a gun).

Witness of Aggression Scale—Participants were given a list of behaviors that some students *witness*. The behaviors pertained to social aggression, simple assault, and aggravated assault (see description above). For each statement, “we would like to know how often in the past year you have witnessed these events happening.” The responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never in the past year*) to 5 (*all the time*). The alpha coefficient for witnessing social aggression, $\alpha = .93$ (10 items); simple assault, $\alpha = .87$ (six items); and aggravated assault, $\alpha = .71$ (five items).

Victim of Aggression Scale—For the *victim* questionnaire, participants were told that below are some behaviors that may have happened to students. The behaviors pertained to social aggression, simple assault, and aggravated assault (see description above). For each statement, “we would like to know how often in the past year these things happened to you.” The responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never in the past year*) to 5 (*all the time*). The alpha coefficients for victim of social aggression, $\alpha = .90$ (10 items); simple assault, $\alpha = .52$ (three items); and aggravated assault, $\alpha = .72$ (five items).

Perpetrator of Aggression Scale—For this questionnaire, participants were asked “how often in the past year they had committed a particular aggressive act.” The behaviors pertained to social aggression, simple assault, and aggravated assault (see description above). The responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never in the past year*)

to 5 (*all the time*). The alpha coefficients for social aggression, $\alpha = .90$ (10 items); simple assault, $\alpha = .81$ (four items); and aggravated assault, $\alpha = .85$ (13 items).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The first sets of results revealed that there was no relationship between age of participant, ethnicity on exposure (victim or witness) to aggression, nor being a perpetrator of aggression across the subscales of aggression (social, simple, and aggravated assault).

Ratings of exposure and perpetrator of aggression—We assessed whether there were gender differences in how often offenders were exposed to aggression by type of aggression (see Table 2). Females witnessed ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.15$) and were victimized ($M = 2.05$, $SD = .81$) by social aggression more often than males ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.89$, for witness) and ($M = 1.54$, $SD = 0.83$, for victim), all p s $< .001$. The findings also showed that female offenders ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.03$) committed social aggression more often than did male offenders ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 0.90$), $p < .001$. However, there were no significant gender differences in being a witness or victim to either simple or aggravated assault. Interestingly, female offenders committed simple assault ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.17$) more often than did males ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.07$, $p < .01$). On the contrary, male offenders committed aggravated assault ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 0.61$) more often than did females ($M = 1.23$, $SD = 0.43$), $p < .01$.

Intercorrelations

Although a detailed analysis of the intercorrelations among the variables presented in Table 3 is beyond the scope of this article, a few comments will be presented. First, for females and within victimization, witnessing, and committing aggression, the correlations among aggressive types were all positive and statistically significant. For example, the correlation for females within victimization ranged from .27 to .53; these correlations suggest the possibility of an underlying dimension of aggressiveness that transcends aggressive type. On the contrary, this pattern of correlations was not present for males. To illustrate, for males within victimization, there is only one significant correlation, .32 for social aggression, which does not correlate with the other two assault variables. Second, as will be shown in sequential analyses, witnessing aggression is positively related to committing aggression.

Differential Predictability Models

Differential predictability (Frederiksen & Melville, 1954) models were used to predict committing each type of aggression. Specifically, we examined gender differences for regression function with both victim and witness variables as predictors. This analysis was undertaken because we were interested in how the regression line was influenced by gender. For differential predictability, an effects coding was used (Kutner, Nachtsheim, Neter, & Li, 2005). Specifically, females were selected as the base group for each predictor, and then the main effect for gender was assessed by a change for males. These main and interaction effects were determined for both the regression intercept and slope. Separate analyses were conducted for witnessing and being a victim in predicting each of the types of aggression (i.e., social, simple assault and, aggravated assault).

Predicting social aggression: Victim and witness—Being a victim of social aggression positively predicted committing social aggression, $F(3, 156) = 5.06, p < .01, R^2 = .08$, for males and females. There were no gender differences in the intercept or in the slope. Witnessing social aggression positively predicted committing social aggression, $F(3, 213) = 26.46, p < .001, R^2 = .27$, for both males and females.

Predicting simple assault: Victim and witness—The results for predicting simple assault from being a victim of said aggression was significant, $F(3, 156) = 4.84, p < .01, R^2 = .09$ (see Figure 1). Thus, being a victim of simple assault predicted committing simple assault for both males and females. There were no significant differences in the intercept or slope for gender.

Witnessing simple assault predicted committing simple assault, $F(3, 212) = 19.57, p < .001, R^2 = .22$ (see Figure 1). Although the slopes for males and females were not significantly different, there was a decrease in the intercept for males ($\beta = -.67, SEB = .30, p < .05$) from females ($\beta = .42, SEB = .12$). Thus, for a given level of witnessing simple assault, females committed more simple assault.

Predicting aggravated assault: Victim and witness—Predicting committing aggravated assault from being a victim of said assault was significant, $F(3, 155) = 29.83, p < .001, R^2 = .37$ (see Figure 2). For both males and females, being a victim of aggravated assault predicted committing aggravated assault. However, as the change in males' slope was significant ($\beta = .30, SEB = .12$), the actual slope for males was approximately double that of females ($\beta = .30, SEB = .10$). Hence, the more males were victimized, in comparison with females, the more males were predicted to commit aggravated assault. The intercept for males and females were not significantly different. For both males and females, witnessing aggravated assault positively predicted committing aggravated assault, $F(3, 209) = 26.74, p < .001, R^2 = .28$ (see Figure 2).

Discussion

There were two major goals of the current study. The First aim was to assess how often youth offenders were a witness, a victim, and/or perpetrator of different types of aggression, including, social aggression, simple, and aggravated assault. The second aim was to examine how one's experience with and exposure to various types of aggression predicted one's perpetration of such aggression, and if the effects were influenced by gender. Given the importance of examining the three types of aggression, we will discuss the findings for social separately from simple and aggravated assault.

Social Aggression

With regard to how often the participants experienced social aggression, we found that females reported being a witness, a victim, and a perpetrator of social aggression with greater rate than did males. These findings support earlier theoretical supposition by Moffitt (1993), suggesting that observation of others committing aggression was sufficient in teaching these aggressive values. Extending Bandura's (1965) initial investigation, which focused on physical aggression, it seems plausible that as children and adolescents

experience other's socially aggressive outbursts, they might elect to subsequently participate in the behavior themselves. This, of course, is based on several assumptions: (a) the initial offender was not punished, and (b) the offender was in fact rewarded. Bandura's suggestion in explaining this endeavor logically follows later work on social and relational aggression in that this type of aggression is often delayed and, oftentimes, goes undetected by authority, making it difficult to punish. Furthermore, other research has shown that even young children believe social aggression to be more acceptable than physical aggression (Tisak et al., 2012). This suggests that a witness may feel justified in committing social aggression.

The findings also revealed that being a victim of and a witness to social aggression significantly predicted subsequent perpetration. However, the findings presented here suggest that witnessing social aggression appears to be more salient in predicting future perpetration than being a victim. Although both witnessing and victimization of social aggression were predictors, effect sizes were stronger for witnessing than for victimization ($R^2 = .27$ and $R^2 = .08$, respectively). In the Tisak et al. (2011) study, both witnessing and victimization predicted social aggression ($R^2 = .34$). One explanation is that the individuals in the current study were involved in criminal activity. Therefore, they may also engage in a social group whereby they witness others committing social aggression and understand the emotional ramifications of such behavior on others, thus rewarding their social aggressive behaviors. However, these individuals might simply experience more aggression entirely, compared with their peers, making these two indicators part of a larger facet in understanding aggressive environments (Cuevas, Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2013; Patchin, Huebner, McCluskey, Varano, & Bynum, 2006).

Simple and Aggravated Assault

In assessing whether there were gender differences in being a witness or victim of simple assault or aggravated assault, the findings revealed no significant difference. However, there were significant distinctions between males and females with regard to being a perpetrator of both simple and aggravated assault. That is, female offenders committed simple assault more often than did males. In contrast, males committed aggravated assault more often than females. This finding is somewhat consistent with other research, showing that based on self-report, females tend to express higher levels of less severe forms of aggression (Stickle et al., 2012). Moreover, findings based on delinquent arrest records indicate that females are more likely to commit misdemeanors aimed at other people (Asscher et al., 2015) commit simple assault (37%) more often than aggravated assault (26%) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). Although the results in Table 1 show no gender difference in the number of arrests of violent crimes by the current participants, it is important to note that the violent crimes listed in that table were not separated by simple and aggravated assault. Thus, the actual arrest data could be consistent with the gender differences found in participants' self-reports of perpetration.

Findings for perpetration of *simple assault* mirrored that of social aggression; although both witnessing and being a victim of simple assault predicted future perpetration, the effects of witnessing were greater than that of victimization ($R^2 = .22$, and $R^2 = .09$, respectively), and again the more females witnessed simple assault, the more they committed this form of

aggression. This type of aggression is characterized by the intent to physically harm another, but without means of tools or weapons, suggesting that one does not intend to seriously harm her target. As was possible for social aggression, it may be that witnessing this form of aggression, but not being a victim, allows one to emotionally remove themselves from the affective outcomes, such as feeling emotional or literal pain, as suggested by previous work on empathy development (Rigby, 2004).

Following the trend discussed with social aggression and simple assault, victimization and witnessing of *aggravated assault* predicted one's own perpetration of aggravated assault. However, in contrast to the findings on social and simple assault, victimization appeared to be more predictive of perpetration than was witnessing ($R^2 = .37$ and $R^2 = .28$, respectively), in line with some previous research (Dubow et al., 2014; Ostrov, 2010; Tisak et al., 2011). This refutes the previous explanations of witnessing causing emotional distance. Rather it is possible that because this type of aggression can be life-threatening, in that individuals who are the victims of such behaviors might feel inclined to engage in equally violent defensive behaviors themselves for protection. Outcomes of these interactions might provide successful victimization deterrence, in line with previous work by Schwartz and Proctor (2000), which could act as a reward and therefore leading to increases in this type of behavior in the future.

Furthermore, this relation was particularly strong for males; the more they were victims of aggravated aggression, the more they used this type of aggression themselves. The gender discrepancy here mirrors previous work in non-delinquent (Sullivan et al., 2006) and delinquent samples of adolescents (Asscher et al., 2015), but is in stark contrast to Calvete and Orue (2013) who found that greater victimization led to greater aggression but only for females. Moreover, Tisak et al. (2011) did not find gender difference in either being a witness or victim of aggravated aggression in predicting committing this type of aggression.

Conclusion

The current study expands on previous research that primarily focused on exposure to violence as unidimensional, rather than multi-faceted. Here, we chose to examine exposure as two dimensions: victimization and witnessing. By doing so, we were able to better understand how each aspect helps to shape one's perpetration of various aggressive expressions. The current study also adds to the literature in that our sample was comprised of both males and female offenders, whereas many previous studies have focused on either one gender or the other. This study also expands previous research by Tisak et al. (2011) by including a juvenile offender sample.

In the present study, females committed social and simple assault with greater frequency in comparison with males, whereas males committed more aggravated assault than females. One possible explanation for these gender differences is that males are higher than females on sensation seeking and behavioral risk taking and females are more sensitive to possible punishment (Cross, Copping, & Campbell, 2011; Tisak, Laurene, & Tisak, 2016). These authors suggested that there may be a motivational difference rather than cognitive differences in males and females. For example, Tisak et al. (2016) found that although

female offenders considered risk of punishment to be greater than the benefits when committing serious criminal behaviors, this was not the case for their committing less serious criminal behaviors. Furthermore, research has shown that high levels of impulsivity predicted later aggression (Fite, Goodnight, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 2008) and males may not evaluate the seriousness of different types of aggression, in contrast with females (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008). Extending from Card et al. (2008) findings, it may be that females also perceive severe forms of aggression, such as aggravated assault, as conceptual different from other forms of aggression, such as social aggression and simple assault. In summary, these findings suggest that males and females perceive aggravated aggression differently in that males are less sensitive to possible outcomes than females, such as explicit punishment (e.g., getting arrested) and perception of harm.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current endeavor, however, could be improved in future research. For example, the current study examined the constructs at one time point. It is important to note that we have not inferred causation in discussing prediction. Ideally, future studies should implement a longitudinal design by which we can accurately measure the gradual progression of aggression, especially to examine whether one type of aggression predicts other types of aggression in the future. Furthermore, it is important to note that the sample was from a juvenile detention center in the Midwest United States. Thus, the findings may not generalize to other delinquent youth or to the general adolescent population.

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Figure 1.
Perpetration of simple assault as predicted by exposure to simple assault.

Figure 2.
Perpetration of aggravated assault as predicted by exposure to aggravated assault.

Table 1

Mean (Standard Deviation) Number of Arrests by Crimes and Gender.

Type of Crime	Males	Females
Violent crimes	2.95 (3.76)	2.70 (3.19)
Sex crimes	0.13 (0.40)	0.11 (0.51)
Property crime	4.59 (4.32)	2.38 (2.63) ***
Drug crime	0.94 (1.63)	0.44 (1.00) ***
Disorderly conduct	1.19 (1.42)	1.20 (1.42)
Traffic violation	1.19 (2.47)	0.62 (1.41) *
Petty offenses	0.52 (0.86)	0.15 (0.45) ***
Weaponry	0.15 (0.40)	0.12 (0.45)
Public order	1.84 (2.16)	1.46 (1.96)
Probation violation	2.87 (3.30)	2.91 (3.75)
School safety violation	1.55 (1.74)	1.52 (2.06)
Perjury	0.18 (0.46)	0.11 (0.44)
Status offenses	0.43 (0.93)	0.47 (1.06)
Total crimes	18.71 (13.51)	14.47 (10.70) *
Total arrests	13.50 (9.33)	11.08 (8.50)

*
 $p < .05$.**
 $p < .01$.***
 $p < .001$.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Victim, Witness, and Perpetration by Aggressive Sub-Type and Gender.

	Females	Males	
Exposure and Type of Aggression	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>p</i>
Witness			
Social aggression	3.54 (1.15)	2.60 (1.89)	<.001
Simple assault	1.82 (0.95)	2.01 (1.06)	NS
Aggravated assault	2.02 (0.80)	2.21 (0.93)	NS
Victim			
Social aggression	2.05 (0.81)	1.54 (0.83)	<.001
Simple assault	1.77 (0.82)	1.76 (0.80)	NS
Aggravated assault	1.30 (0.61)	1.49 (0.64)	NS
Perpetrator			
Social aggression	2.60 (1.03)	2.15 (0.90)	<.001
Simple assault	2.74 (1.17)	2.43 (1.07)	<.01
Aggravated assault	1.23 (0.43)	1.42 (0.61)	<.01

Note. Scores ranged from 1 (*never in the past*) to 5 (*all the time*). *p* values are reported for comparisons using means and standard deviations. NS = not significant different.

Table 3

Summary of Intercorrelations for Victimization, Witnessing, and Committing Aggression by Aggression Type.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Victim									
1. Social aggression	—	.53***	.27**	.42***	.14	.10	.11	-.07	.06
2. Simple assault	.26	—	.49***	.24*	.40***	.32***	.22*	.15	.33***
3. Aggravated assault	.23	.32*	—	.21*	.59***	.62***	.31**	.39***	.64***
Witness									
4. Social aggression	.24	.17	.24	—	.37***	.32***	.43***	.25**	.17
5. Simple assault	.06	.31*	.45***	.29**	—	.68***	.31***	.51***	.59***
6. Aggravated assault	-.08	-.02	.34*	.17	.62***	—	.28**	.45***	.52***
Perpetrator									
7. Social aggression	.24	.25	.29*	.51***	.26*	.19	—	.64***	.48***
8. Simple assault	.09	.39**	.43**	.36***	.34***	.33**	.77***	—	.61***
9. Aggravated assault	-.27	.11	.41**	.29**	.38***	.48***	.52***	.61***	—

Note. Correlations for females are presented above the diagonal; males are presented below.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .001$.