

## Sugar, spice and everything nice: Just what are deviant girls made of?

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### Abstract

Recently within academic and popular discourse, focus and interest has amplified on the relational and ‘increasingly’ physical aggression of young women. Examinations into young women’s aggression have tended to construct it as a new and emerging phenomenon. This article will compare the historical conception of the aggression of young women, found in the work of G.S. Hall, with current ideas of teenage feminine aggression found in popular and academic discussions. It will show that many of the current ‘emerging’ and popular ideas can be seen in Hall’s theory. Moreover, these ideas limit the aggressive behaviours of young women to pathological and problematic definitions. Hence, a need to critique and question the foundations of the psychology of adolescence continues to this day.

### Keywords

*gender, aggression, G.S. Hall, psychology, bullying, adolescence, history, popular culture*

This week Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft told The Press that 20 per cent of youth crime was now committed by females, compared to 15 per cent two years ago. ‘What we’re seeing is more violence by young women ... you get 16-year-olds with the life experience of a 30-year-old involved in things like prostitution and substance use (Thomas, 2005).

On March 10, 2002, New Zealand media reported the abandonment of an Isuzu utility vehicle in Waitara. The next day, the body of Kenneth Pigott was found in the Waitara River prompting an investigation. It was originally assumed that Pigott died as a result of a hitch-hiking incident. However, it was later found that three young women had attacked Pigott with a hammer for the sole objective of obtaining the vehicle for a night of joyriding. This crime was one of several serious crimes covered by media in 2002 involving young people (Beals, 2008a). Being an election year, the public expressed outrage at a generation of youth gone wild. Moreover, a particular type of concern was expressed because, unlike other youth crimes in the media that year, the death of Kenneth Pigott involved young women. The media reported consistently that young women were becoming *more* violent, reflecting a greater societal breakdown (Beals, 2008b). This is illustrated in the reporting of Lyn Humphreys on the Pigott case and a presumed increase in youth offending:

But is it true that children are offending more, at a younger age and more violently? ... Youth Aid Sergeant Fiona Prestidge and Senior Constable Trevor Smith say they are seeing an increase in violent crimes, and an increase in younger children offending. ‘The level of violence has increased – not just because of what has happened in Waitara – but the number of younger children and females offending is increasing,’ Prestidge says. ‘There’s not any quality research on these things. But I hear it through my dealings with the multi-agencies I work with and they are saying female youths are definitely appearing more as violent offenders’ (Humphreys, 2002).

In the years following, New Zealand media continued to run stories concerning the moral breakdown of the nation’s young women. Predominately, the media focused on their bullying behaviours. For example, in 2006 Alex Teka took her life after a prolonged period of psycho-

logical and social strain. While Alex's mother and her peers acknowledged that many factors led to Alex's decision, the media (Rothwell, 2006; Staff Reporters, 2006a, 2006b; Woulfe, 2008) focused on a group of young women at Alex's school who they described as manipulative girls who actively used bullying techniques to push Alex to her limits.

The story of Alex Teka told in the national news reflected a story told through international popular culture at the time, in particular the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*. The movie was based on a parenting self-help book *Queen Bees and Wannabes* (Wiseman, 2002). Rosalind Wiseman intended the book to be a parenting self-help guide educating mothers about the dangers of high school for their teenage daughters. She cautioned readers, telling them they could expect to see their daughter journey through a variety of dysfunctional relationships across girl-group settings. Wiseman argued that, despite the popular image of the male school bully towering over his victim, young women also engage in bullying. However, she tells us, the bullying behaviour of young women differs in nature from that of young men. While boys resort to physically pushing their victims around, girls seek to emotionally torture their victims through gossip, manipulation and underhanded conversation.

These contrasting images of young women (the violent killer and the manipulative bully) create a problematic space for the expression of femininity (Brown & Chesney-Lind, 2013). In this space we have the uncomfortable image of 'normal' femininity given in the work of Wiseman (2002) and in the case of Alex Teka. To be teenage, female and normal is to be manipulative and nasty. But we also have a disturbing image of the girl-gone-wild; the abnormal female. This is the image portrayed in the story of Kenneth Pigott's gruesome death. To be teenage, female and abnormal involves physical aggression and extreme acts of violence. But where have these images of female aggression come from? Is even the concept of aggression and deviance gendered in nature? Do images of female aggression portray a new problem emerging at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century or do they have a whakapapa (history) in past ideas and theories of youth development? The aim of this article is to explore the contemporary traces of gendered aggression back to the work of Granville Stanley Hall, the so called 'father of adolescence' (France, 2007; Lesko, 2001; Santrock, 2001).

## Methodology

Genealogical approaches to the exploration of knowledge became popular with the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1984) and his exemplary explorations into ideas of sexuality (Foucault, 1976) and psychology, criminology and the self-disciplined individual (Foucault, 1977). Using the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1921), Foucault (1984) developed a methodological approach (the genealogical approach), which both explored the emergence of particular expert knowledges and the implications that occurred (in terms of power, resistance and struggle) in the application of that knowledge. Since Foucault published his work, researchers exploring the play of gender dynamics (Bailey, 1993; Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1998; Lessa, 2006; McNay, 1992) have adapted and used his ideas in a variety of topics and settings across academic disciplines.

Foucault (1972a, 1972b) argues that subjects are situated within complex discursive webs of competing discourses. Iara Lessa (2006) summarises Foucault's concept of discourse as 'systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak' (p.285). To this effect, Foucault's (1976, 1977, 1984) genealogical approach involves a complex and systematic untangling of this web in order to understand the complexity of knowledge and power. In such an untangling, a researcher is able to find the institutional interconnection between knowledge,

power/resistance and subjectivity. In my own research (Beals, 2008a) I have been interested in the interconnected space of media and academia and how traces of commonsense knowledge in popular discourse can be found in the expert knowledges of academic discourse. I have found that using Foucault's ideas of locating the emergence of knowledge within history and exploring its genealogy is useful in exploring the complex relationships in such intersections and interconnections. My focus has been particularly on the framing of 'young people' as outsiders, deviants, to mainstream 'adult' culture. As such, I have explored areas such as youth crime, youth bullying and the aggressive behaviours of young people in popular (predominately mass) media and academic discussions. Aggression is typically framed as a male trait manifesting itself in physical displays such as fighting or the physical bullying of another (Brown 2013, Burman 2004, Ringrose 2006). So how is the aggression of young women displayed?

To explore the representations of the aggressive and deviant behaviours of young women in Aotearoa New Zealand media (archived print and television media), I applied Foucault's method of genealogy to two sets of data. The first was all archived print articles (archived on the Newztext Database) and television current affairs items (recorded manually) on youth crime and youth deviance in the year of 2002. The second was all archived print articles (through Newztext) and recorded current affairs items on the topic of bullying between the years of 2003 and 2008. I applied a systematic content analysis to both sets of data to explore dimensions of gender, socioeconomic status, family, ethnicity and social class. In each of these dimensions I used a genealogical approach to explore the intersection between expert knowledge (academic knowledge) and commonsense (or popular) knowledge as portrayed in New Zealand mass media.

I first applied a genealogical approach in my doctoral research (Beals, 2008a) to explore conceptions and representations of deviant youth and I have continued to use it to explore conceptions of teenage bullying. In both contexts, a key finding of concern was notions of gender and deviance in which aggressive behaviours in males shows a normal course of development, whereas aggressive behaviours in females show an abnormal course of development. I should note that the finding on aggression and young women is not an undue focus of the media, which, in general tends to frame adolescent aggression as a male trait, albeit it a normal male trait, unless manifested in cases of extreme violence. However, when the aggression of females is referred to in media texts, the gendered nature of the aggression is highlighted and hence becomes a topic of discussion and reflection.

The gendered nature of aggression and the tendency to frame the aggression of young women as abnormal is not a new finding and has been analysed in depth by a number of predominant researchers in the field of gender studies (Alder & Worrall, 2004; Brown, 2013; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Ringrose, 2006). However, there has been limited examination on the links between contemporary ideas and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas of Hall who first coined the word 'adolescence' to describe the period between childhood and adulthood. As such, he was the first to attempt to develop an expert knowledge of this period of human development. His research explored the physical, sexual, emotional and psychological development of hundreds of adolescent youth, both male and female. While researchers such as Nancy Lesko (2001) tend to now regard Hall's ideas as problematic and no longer relevant in today's world, this article explores the question: do traces of Hall remain in our thinking today?

## Hall's theory of adolescence

Hall's (1908a, 1908b) key interest was the 'problem' of adolescence. He saw adolescence as a manifestation of deviance in all its forms. Hall developed his theory to respond to the social upheaval he observed occurring across industrial countries. Other theorists such as Durkheim (1999), writing at the same time in the discipline of sociology, analysed society itself and ar-

gued that problem lay within a breakdown of traditional social structures. In contrast, Hall, using psychological explanations, internalised the problem as being within the individual psychology of the adolescent. This reflected a moral panic about the criminal deviance of young boys and the sexual deviance of young girls which emerged throughout the industrialised world at that time, including in Aotearoa New Zealand (Lesko, 2001; Morris Matthews, 2002; Shuker, Openshaw & Soler, 1990). Hall's theory differentiated the youth problem from adult society. His was one of the first theories to portray youth as 'other' to adult. In Hall's opinion, the problem youth posed to society could be understood better if one looked at young people as a separate social group who, because of its not-yet-adult status, was prone to deviance.

According to Halls' biographer Dorothy Ross (1972), Hall's theory was criticised by contemporary theorists such as Sigmund Freud, because it blended archaic science and popular mythology. However, Ross notes that Hall had the ability to make his theory saleable, appealing to commonsense notions and folk science, by drawing extensively upon already existent theories of evolution and deviance, particularly recapitulation theory (Hall, 1908a). Recapitulation theory framed the Caucasian race as superior and conceptualised the development of 'savage' societies into more 'civilised' societies through periods of massive turmoil. According to this theory, 'savage' societies would have to evolve through this period of turmoil or die off altogether. Hall took this concept and its theoretical baggage, and applied it to adolescence. Griffin (1993) and Lesko (1996, 2001) argue that Hall's theory effectively marginalised particular groups of young people (the poor, females, and ethnic minorities) by associating these groups with 'savage' and 'less civilised' societies. Right from the outset, his theory denigrated the position of young women (Lesko, 2001). As shown in the following quote from Hall (1908b), just as the 'savage' was associated with nature in recapitulation theory, so was 'femininity'. Young women could never achieve a civilised position simply because recapitulation reasoning would not allow it through connecting their social position to their evolutionary past:

...woman is more rooted in the past and the future, closer to the race and more generic past. Thus again, in very many of the above traits, woman is far nearer childhood than man, and therefore in mind and body more prophetic of the future as well as reminiscent of the past. (Hall 1908b, p.566)

## **Feminine aggression: The ways in which young women are allowed to be aggressive**

Hall (1908a) argued that both males and females displayed acts of aggression. However, he identified key differences between the sexes. Hall maintained that males were prone to acts of physical aggression. He saw this as quite normal behaviour and argued that society should allow and harness it, because it could lead to acts of courage. For Hall, the deviant behaviour of young men was a key ingredient in the development of 'civilised' societies. As the young male developed his cognitive abilities, he would be able to control his urge to aggression. Even today, the need for deviance to emerge in young men to build character can be seen in expectations on young men today to be thrill-seekers and risk-takers (Campbell 2002). Reflecting Hall, the argument still exists that the aggression of young men needs to have an 'outlet for expression' so that young men can develop 'normally'.

In contrast, the aggression of adolescent girls was seen by Hall (1908a) as pathological, even when it reflected a feminine 'nature'. For Hall, the 'normal' aggression of young women was emotional and psychological, and did not result in the development of heroic capabilities. His rationale was that young women's aggression manifested itself in inappropriate behaviours that were often projected onto other young women:

The young woman's life is far more subjective and in the teens she almost always learns to control the more

violent physical outbreaks, but may become whining, peevish, or use her tongue in place of her fists (Hall, 1908a, p.355).

It is hard for girls to admit that others are more beautiful, witty, cultured, than themselves, and rivalry often drives them to extreme and even desperate acts. Vents of this passion are often secret and underhanded (Hall, 1908a, p.357).

This picture that Hall (1908a) paints is similar to the one portrayed by the New Zealand media in the portrayal of Alex Teka's death. For example, a television current affairs item (Prendeville, 2007) focused on the story of Alex and attributed her death to the emotional bullying of a group of girls. Prendeville's (2007) reporting focused on the behaviour of the young women in Alex's case. It avoided exploring the complex circumstances in Alex's life, including recent losses in her family. This focus in the mainstream media on the behaviour of young women in bullying is also evident in the reporting of Lane Nichols (2008). Nichols argues that the public should be seriously concerned about the rising new tide of bullying behaviours displayed by young women and confirmed by experts:

Girls' violence is rising in schools as the effects of cyberbullying and reality television turn them into 'Barbie bitches' ... Experts point to a new gang-like mentality among schoolgirls whereby a popular 'queen-bee' uses friends to bully or hurt others to enforce her power (Nichols, 2008, p.A1).

The Nichols' (2008) story is making a direct reference to Wiseman's (2002) book on the high school bullying of young women. The concept of 'queen bee' attaches itself to the book's title, but also to the metaphor that is aroused within the concept of insect/animal like behaviour in a fight to achieve supremacy. Probably without direct association Wiseman draws upon Hall (1908a, p.355) in his concept of girls using their 'tongues in place of their fists':

When your daughter walks down the hall to her history class, what's she more likely talking to her friends about: the upcoming class or the latest gossip? Teasing and gossip swirl around your daughter's head every day and they're the lifeblood of cliques and popularity. While your daughter may feel that they provide the forum for bonding with her friends, teasing and gossip can also act as powerful weapons to pit girls against each other (Wiseman, 2002, p.113).

Despite Hall (1908a, 1908b), making the same reference at the turn of the last century, these contemporary notions of the aggression of young women describe it as both new and different to boys. In the language of expertise, this form of aggression has been formally labelled as 'indirect relational aggression' (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000).

Reflecting Hall (1908a), researchers such as Kaj Bjorkqvist (1994) argue that women have the potential to be as aggressive as males but that their aggression is qualitatively different. The aggression of young women is hidden and secretive. Young women may publicly act out the passive caring female, but in secret they attack and undermine others through manipulative methods and 'hostile emotional outbreaks' (Bjorkqvist, 1994, p.182). While young men will be driven by testosterone, they will learn to control it. In contrast, the aggression of young women is driven by uncontrollable and untameable hormones and emotions (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Hadley, 2003, 2004).

Hall (1908a) also connected feminine aggression to a manifestation of hormonal development; the menstrual cycle. He argued that young women were prone to emotional outbursts, hysteria, manic attacks and overall psychological turmoil at certain times during the menstrual period. If physical aggression occurred at these times, Hall suggested that the liability of the young woman was highly questionable.

It is evident that there are clear links between contemporary conceptions of feminine 'normal' aggression and the ideas of Hall (1908a, 1908b). While there may be real differences

between the deviance of young women and that of young men, with such a focus on the difference, the actions of indirect relational bullying of young men are overlooked. In this context, it is difficult to get a sense of the 'sameness' of bullying. For example, in the death of Daniel Gillies in 2003, media reporting made a direct connection to cyberbullying but gave no real description of the male bullies or the bullying behaviour of males (as a discrete group). In fact, as the following shows, any mention of gender is omitted:

Daniel's mother Helen Algar has no doubt her son killed himself because of the bullying texts. "Some time that night, he made and received a number of text messages that caused him to leave the house and go to the top of that cliff. My son is dead and those text messages were a significant factor in that. Text messaging can be a potent weapon" (Bramwell & Massen, 2003, p.A1).

Furthermore, the language used to describe female bullying is concerning. Females are viewed as victims to their biology and psychology and, as such, there is a definite focus on the 'nature' of femininity in aggression. It is in these descriptions that we find traces of recapitulation theory. Hall argued that females were at the base of recapitulation, as their behaviour reflects their primitive and savage nature.

### **Physical aggression: When young girls act outside of their feminine nature**

The pathological character of the violent female has been a topic of focus in criminology since Lombroso and Ferrero (1895) documented the physical features of adult female criminals in the 1800s. However, over the last 25 years, there has been a focus on the variables or 'risk factors' which put an individual child at risk of developing criminal deviance before they reach adulthood. This has moved the focus from a gendered *adult* deviance to a gendered *adolescent* deviance. While Hall (1908a, 1908b) never used the words 'risk factors', his intense use of statistics and predictive analysis shows an attempt to predict deviance. However, Hall also believed that any form of physical aggression in adolescent females was abnormal and reflected other deeper and unfixable pathologies. The offending of young women was unpredictable in Hall's opinion, whereas particular characteristics of young men could be used to predict future offending.

David Farrington (1996, 1997) and Rolf Loeber (1996) are considered to be the researchers who established the field of risk factor research and analysis. Farrington and Loeber both focus on the developmental pathways of young men to identify the factors increasing the likelihood of criminal offending later in life. They choose to focus on young males because of the disproportionate numbers of males in the prison population. This focus on male patterns of offending, which overshadowed the same indicators of offending within female populations, has been evident throughout a variety of studies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has led to a misconception that recent reporting of the physical aggression of young women has identified an emerging pathology not seen in previous generations (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996).

Since Farrington (1996, 1997) and Loeber (1996) started researching risk factors for criminal offending, researchers into the gendered nature of deviance have also attempted to identify the types of factors which protect a young person from entering into a criminal career (Ferguson & Horwood, 2002; Hart, O'Toole, Price-Sharps, & Shaffer, 2007; Hema, 2001; McLaren, 2000; Smith & Carlson, 1997; Wasserman et al., 2003). Typically, in discussing gender, these researchers argue that being female is a protective factor against criminal deviance and aggression. Furthermore, they argue that young men are more susceptible to the risk factors that stimulate the development of criminal aggression (Fagan, van Horn, Hawkins, & Arthur, 2007). Hence, criminal deviance and aggression is framed as a male trait (Alder & Worrall, 2004).

Young men, not young women, are expected to commit more crimes and to be physically more violent. This is evident in the statistics (Ministry of Justice, 2011); young men do offend at a greater rate, but does this mean that young women do not offend?

Despite the focus of risk factors being on the deviance and violent behaviour of young males, who are the predominant offenders, young women do engage in physical and violent offending (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996), even when their gender is seen to protect them. Such a focus on both the protective aspect of gender and the contradictory evident behaviours of females feeds into a growing public concern over the emerging violent offending by adolescent girls (Davis, 2007; Worrall, 2004). In New Zealand policy and practice we see both the role of being female as protecting one from criminal activity and the contradiction that young females are acting outside of this gender boundary and, as such, there is no real space for the female offender:

Being female is a significant protective factor. Notwithstanding this, concern has been expressed, particularly by practitioners such as the Police, that offending by young females is becoming more serious and violent (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002, p.12).

Steffensmeier & Allan (1996) argue that it is contemporary interests and changes in contemporary society that have seen young women's aggression becoming a focus of debate, rather than a change in the nature of femininity. However, this behaviour is still typically seen as out of character and symbolic of other serious issues within the adolescent girls presenting such behaviours (Brown & Chesney-Lind, 2013; Campbell, 1999) and, therefore, worthy of public speculation (Carrington, 1997). These young women cannot be positioned within the contemporary definition of risk and deviance because one needs to be male to be at risk of being deviant. As such, reflecting Hall's (1908a) theory, the violent offending of young women is seen as being symptomatic of a deeper psychological pathology.

## G Stanley Hall: 100 years on

It could be argued that understandings of aggressive deviance and adolescence have changed since the 1900s but have they really moved from their foundations? There is still a focus on children and young people being 'not quite' adult and perhaps more akin to Hall's (1908a) 'savage' youth. Even evolutionary studies into the aggressive behaviours of young women describe and compare their 'differences' in aggression to the aggressive behaviour of mice and primates (Bjorkqvist and Niemela 1992, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen 1992; Campbell, 1999, 2002). These studies may advance knowledge but they also seem to suggest that the feminine aggression harks back to an ancient stereotype. Indeed, as Jane Brown (2013) has observed, it seems that our contemporary understanding of the aggression of young women is comforting more than confronting because it refers to age-old stereotypes of what it means to be young, gendered and violent. Many of these age-old stereotypes found their way into Hall's (1908a, 1908b) definition of the deviance of young women. One hundred years on from Hall, current conceptions of adolescence continue to connect it to a time of hormonal and biological turmoil that manifests in deviance. The aggression of young males is considered necessary to the development of a normal adult male; while, the behaviour of young women, whether it be indirect relational aggression or criminal aggression, continues to be seen as pathologically feminine (Ringrose, 2006; Gonick, 2004).

Hall's (1908a) work of feminine deviance also endorsed a sexualised component of deviance and aggression. To Hall, the aggression of young women expresses a sexual desire in the competition for the attention of young men. This desire was heavily heterosexual and reflective of the dominant social norms (class and ethnic structures). Indirect relational aggression paints

a similar picture. The aggression displayed by young women is seen as a reflection of the hormonal nature of females and the need for young women to feel that they are seen, and are desirable, by fellow young men. Hall's position of the normal but pathological young women was attributed to class, ethnic background and heterosexual identity. Today, young women from marginal groups are still not included in descriptions of indirect relational aggression; they are the physical and violent criminals not the indirectly aggressive schoolyard fighters (Brown 2013, Chesney-Lind & Eliason 2006).

### **The social implications of pathologising the aggressive deviance of young women**

One of the issues facing both Hall and researchers today is how language itself is gendered (Brown, 2013). Even in the late 1800s, Hall recognised the limitations of language. He used gendered pronouns in his texts, but gender is not just attached to the pronouns we use. In reality, the word 'aggression' is gendered, through a stereotypical image of aggression as 'masculine' (Brown 2013, Burman 2004, Ringrose 2006). The images conjured up with this word can often move beyond gender to include ethnicity, age and sexuality. Any challenge to these stereotypical images is a problem. Even without the adjective 'physical' attached, aggression is normally seen as a masculine way to gain power (Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2007; Miller & White 2004; Moore 2007). As Hall (1908a) demonstrates in his celebration of the physical aggression of developing males, physical aggression is a valued trait of masculinity.

Hall (1908a, 1908b), like researchers today, faced the challenge of fitting another gender, another group, within his definition of aggression and, as a result, young women were pathologised. Today, the indirect relational aggression literature has acknowledged the gendered nature of the word 'aggression' (e.g. Bjorkqvist 1994). However it has not effectively redefined aggression but, rather, repositioned young women back into Hall's theory. The risk with trying to embed a concept that is very complex, like 'deviance', within pre-established definitions ignores the complexity of the lives and roles of young women today (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). In the end, the damage is done to young people and the girls themselves (Brown & Chesney-Lind, 2013). Young women are reduced to being viewed as malicious hormonal 'bitches' and minority groups of young women are seen as the group to be monitored and controlled (Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2007).

Today Hall's theory has become a cultural archetype which continues to resurface in theories to further pathologise and problematise young women. His influence on our thinking goes beyond *sturm und drang* (storm and stress) to the very ways we define what is normal when it comes to teenage acts of aggression. We are left with the challenge to question these concepts by exploring their foundations and highlighting their anomalies. In reality, it is a challenge to our 'human' condition which often seeks to make the strange familiar by defaulting to the concepts and ideas we already have to further our understanding. The risky territory we should venture into would seek to pull apart the historical foundations of theory in order to allow for new ways of thinking and new ways of living 'gender'.

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