

**Disproportionate Minority Processing of Females:  
A Comparison of Native, Black and White Juveniles**

by

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**Abstract**

Racial comparisons in the literature have tended to focus on males and on comparisons of white and African American males. In this paper we examine four years of statewide referral data in Alaska and compare female delinquents from Alaska's three largest racial groups (whites, Alaska Natives, and African Americans). During the four years of data collection, 4,598 females accounted for 7,849 referrals. Urban/rural differences in referral practices are examined and referral outcomes (informal probation, probation, institutionalization) are assessed by race.

## **Disproportionate Minority Processing of Females: A Comparison of Native, Black and White Juveniles**

Although there is growing interest in the study of racial disparities in the juvenile justice system, the research has primarily reported comparisons of white and African American youth. A small body of literature includes Native American boys in the comparisons and some studies compare white and minority youth, presumably including all minorities (black, Native, Hispanic, Asian). Few of these studies appear to include girls. Studies of female delinquents are rare and those which compare female delinquents by race rarer still. The research reported here involves a comparison of female delinquents by race specifically, addressing differences among white, Alaska Native, and African American girls.

Comparative studies of delinquent boys have found that minorities are disproportionately represented at all of the “decision points” in the juvenile justice process. Some researchers have noted that earlier decisions influence later ones (e.g., Feyerherm, 1995; Bishop & Frazier, 1996). The first decision in the process is made by the police, but this decision is difficult to study since the decision to deal informally with the youth is rarely recorded. Wordes and Bynum (1995) used a combination of police records, interviews with officers, and personal observation to explore racial disparity in police decision making. They found race associated with the police decision to refer the youth to juvenile court, to take them into custody, and/or to securely detain them

Bishop and Frazier (1996) used regression analysis to assess the impact of race at several decision points in the processing of juveniles and found race strongly associated with the decision to detain. Because detention decisions influence disposition decisions, race had an impact on the later decisions as well.

In their report to the Washington Legislature, the Juvenile Justice Racial Disproportionality Work Group (1994) reported race associated with nearly every step in the juvenile justice process. Although minority juveniles in Washington state were *less* likely to be arrested than white youth, they were twice as likely to be referred to juvenile court, twice as likely to be detained prior to their hearings, less likely to be diverted, more likely to be prosecuted, and more likely to be institutionalized at disposition.

These studies either deal specifically with comparing African Americans and white youth or do not specify the minority. Studies which compare white and minority youth seem to include all non-Caucasian youth in the minority group (African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Hispanic). Studies which deal specifically with the delinquent activities of Native American youth are relatively rare.

Studies which address Native American/Alaska Native youth show them represented in the juvenile justice system in proportions much greater than their proportions in the general population. Poupart (1995), for example, examined juvenile court records in a Wisconsin county and found Native American youth more likely than white youth to experience the more severe outcome at every decision point from intake to final disposition. Feld (1995) compared the processing of Native, black, and white youth in a county in Minnesota. He found that being Native influenced the detention decision, but only half as much as did being black. Leiber (1994) reported similar results from a study in Iowa: Native American youth received more severe dispositions than white youth, but more lenient ones than African American youth.

Similar results have been reported in Alaska studies. Schafer and Curtis (1994), in a study of statewide detention, found the mean length of detention greater for African American youth than for white or Alaska Native youth. In a study of several years of detention data, both black and Native youth were found to be more likely than white youth to experience numerous detentions (Schafer & Curtis, 1995).

Few of these studies dealt specifically with female delinquents. Research involving minority female delinquents is quite rare. Farnworth (1984) studied delinquency among African American youth and compared girls and boys. She found considerable differences between boys and girls, especially in regards to family problems, school problems, and violence. Moore (1991) compared boys and girls in Latin American gangs and found differences based on gender stereotypes, socialization, and cultural norms. Some of this research reflects stereotypes of the sort found in studies of female delinquents where race was not specified, particularly the paternalism hypotheses formulated by Chesney-Lind (1973) in her seminal early work and iterated in a recent book (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998). Chesney-Lind found that the differential processing of girls for status offenses was related to the courts' perception that girls need protection more than boys do.

Feld (1995) noted the exceptional proportion of Native youth processed for status offenses but did not separate his sample by gender. Parry (1986) reported similar results: Alaska Native youth were significantly more likely than white youth to be referred to the juvenile justice system for status offenses. Becker, et al. (1989) examined four years of Alaska referral data and noted the growing population of Native females whose referrals grew each year and more than doubled over the four-year period under examination. In another study of Alaska juveniles, Schafer and Curtis (1997) found a higher mean number of alcohol offenses for Alaska Native girls than for Alaska Native boys. These studies suggest support for a paternalism hypothesis, and this is one of the hypotheses that underlie this study. A number of stereotypes, related to both race and gender, are examined. Specifically, we try to address the following hypotheses:

1. Girls are *more* likely than boys to be referred for alcohol offenses.
2. Girls are *less* likely than boys to be referred for crimes against persons.
3. Alaska Native girls are more likely than either white or African American girls to be referred for alcohol offenses.
4. African American girls are more likely than either Alaska Native or white girls to be referred for assault.
5. African American girls are more likely than either Alaska Native or white girls to be referred for drug-related offenses.
6. Regional variations in the referral offenses of girls will reveal urban/rural differences vis-a-vis underage drinking.
7. Minority girls are more likely than white girls to accumulate numerous referrals.
8. White girls are more likely than either African American or Alaska Native girls to have their cases dismissed at intake.

## Research Methodology

In Alaska all justice services but local law enforcement are centralized at the state level. Juvenile justice services are administered under the aegis of Family and Youth Services, a division of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. DFYS manages facilities for both the detention and institutionalization of juveniles as well as juvenile probation and aftercare services. Because DFYS is a state agency, data are collected in a uniform manner and entered into a statewide case management system known as PROBER. The Division was interested in a study of disparate minority processing and made four years of referral data available to the Justice Center.

The data entries were made by field staff, and mistakes did occur. Wherever possible, accommodations were made for flaws in data entry. In computing age it was found that date of birth was frequently entered incorrectly (resulting in appearances in the data of several infants and toddlers). Although a substantial number of referrals tied to 7, 8, and 9-year-olds appeared in the data (N=782), a decision was made to confine the analysis to youth 10 to 17 years of age. The legal variables included charge (reason for referral) and prior record, while processing decisions included intake and judicial outcomes.

It should be noted that the referral data are *incident-based* and that the number of youths referred is considerably lower than the number of referrals. Referral data was reduced to individual data for some of the analyses. We were able to determine prior record for individual youth by examining previous appearances in the full data set (1992-1995). Our analysis of individuals is confined to those whose full delinquent history is in the data set. Only those youth who had no prior record at their first appearance in the data set were included.

The final data set consisted of 28,618 referrals attributed to white, African American, and Alaska Native Youth who were 10-17 years old at the time of their first referral. Females accounted for 27.4 percent of the referrals (N=7,849). This large body of data provided interesting opportunities for analysis, but DFYS was also interested in personalizing some of the findings. To this end, they agreed to provide access to a small number of individual files.

A stratified sample of youth from the larger sample was randomly selected for in-depth study. Stratification ensured equal proportions from each racial group, but within each group subjects were randomly selected. The Division of Family and Youth Services made the files of these youth available to Justice Center researchers. Files from some offices were sent to regional headquarters (there are three DFYS regions in the state). Though the majority of files were available in Anchorage, trips to Fairbanks, Juneau and Palmer were made over a period of several weeks.

The original sample consisted of 150 files, 50 randomly selected from each of the three racial groups. However some files were never found—some because the file had been transferred along with the youth to another region; some because staff were reluctant to share them, and some because they had been misplaced. Our final sample consisted of 112 youth, 40 of whom were females.

Each file was examined and field notes entered. Attention was paid to notes about family and school, as well as the details of each arrest report and/or referral. Notes by intake officers and probation officers about attitudes observed during interviews with parents and children were also examined. Some of the files were lengthy and reflected contacts with child protection agencies as well as youth corrections; others contained minimal information. The contents of some files were transcribed in ten minutes; some took two or three hours. Some of the files were very carefully organized; others were not.

One of the limitations of the study was the fact that five different people collected the data. Some doubtless overlooked information that might have provided insight, but time constraints made it impossible for one person to be responsible for data collection. The primary goal of this labor intensive data collection was to identify those individual characteristics that might help to explain racial differences.

### **Girls in the Larger Data Set**

The 28,618 referrals in the PROBER derived data set involved 14,145 individuals for a mean number of referrals per youth of 2.03. More than a quarter of the youth were female (N=4,598) and they accounted for 7,849 referrals – an average of 1.71 per girl, compared to 2.18 for boys. In Table 1 the girls are compared with boys by race.

White girls comprised a smaller percentage of the delinquent girls than white boys did of the boys in the sample. While the differences are not significant, Native girls comprised a larger percentage of all Native youth referred (34.7%) than did either black (32.5%) or white (31.6%) girls of the total of black and white youth referred. African American boys and girls were represented in the same proportions. While white youth, both boys and girls, are under represented as a proportion of the population of 10 17-year-olds in the state, both of the minority groups are over represented:

**Table 1. Alaska Juveniles Referred, 1992-1995:  
Gender Distribution by Race**

	Girls		Boys		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
White	2,964	64.5 %	6,404	67.1 %	<b>9,368</b>	66.2 %
Alaska Native	1,292	28.1	2,434	25.5	<b>3,726</b>	26.3
African American	342	7.4	709	7.4	<b>1,051</b>	7.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,598</b>		<b>9,547</b>		<b>14,145</b>	

African Americans were close to 5 percent of this age group in Alaska during the years under study; Alaska Natives were approximately 23 percent (range 22.5% to 23.4%).

The girls were referred for a number of reasons, but two types of offenses accounted for 60 percent of initial referrals – misdemeanor theft (often shoplifting in police reports) accounted for 40.6 percent of all first referral charges and underage drinking for 19.7 percent. These were the most frequent charges for boys as well, but the percentages were considerably smaller – 26.3 percent of the boys were initially charged with misdemeanor theft and 11.5 percent with underage drinking. (See Table 2 for a comparison of girls and boys.)

**Table 2. Eight Most Frequently Occuring Charges at First Referral:  
A Comparison by Gender**

	Girls		Boys		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Theft 3, 4	1,869	40.6 %	2,508	26.3 %	<b>4,377</b>	<b>30.9 %</b>
Underage drinking	906	19.7	1,104	11.6	<b>2,010</b>	<b>14.2</b>
Assault 3, 4	424	9.2	1,006	10.5	<b>1,430</b>	<b>10.1</b>
Criminal mischief 3, 4	259	5.6	984	10.3	<b>1,243</b>	<b>8.8</b>
Concealment of merchandise	238	5.2	863	9.0	<b>1,101</b>	<b>7.8</b>
Misconduct involving a controlled substance 1, 2	128	2.8	378	4.0	<b>506</b>	<b>3.6</b>
Criminal trespass	121	2.6	364	3.8	<b>485</b>	<b>3.4</b>
Burglary	116	2.5	346	3.6	<b>462</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>Subtotal, 8 most frequent charges</b>	<b>4,061</b>	<b>88.3 %</b>	<b>7,553</b>	<b>79.1 %</b>	<b>11,614</b>	<b>82.1 %</b>
Other offenses	537	11.7	1,994	20.9	<b>2,531</b>	<b>17.9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,598</b>		<b>9,547</b>		<b>14,145</b>	

While their frequency ranking was the same, the proportion of girls charged initially with underage drinking is considerably higher than for boys. Girls accounted for 45.1 percent of all arrests for drinking, yet they are only 32.5 percent of all youth in the sample. This does suggest that drinking by girls is viewed more seriously than drinking by boys and supports our first hypothesis. Alaska girls are more likely than boys to be referred for alcohol offenses.

For girls the third most frequent referral was for misdemeanor assault – 9.2 percent of girls were initially referred for assault in the third or fourth degree. Almost the same proportion of boys was initially charged with misdemeanor assault (9.1%), but two other charges ranked above assault in frequency for boys – criminal mischief (10.6%) and burglary (10.3%). Because the proportions are so similar for both sexes, it is not possible to say that boys are more likely than girls to be referred for crimes against persons.

The eight charges which appeared most frequently as initial referrals were the same for both males and females but except for the first two their order was quite different. These eight comprised 88.3 percent of all first referral charges for girls and 79.1 percent for boys (see Table 2 for this comparison).

Because these eight charges comprised so many of the girls' referrals, we focus on them in assessing referral charges by race, which are shown in Table 3. This table addresses three of the hypotheses examined. The first is that Native girls are indeed more likely than either white or black girls to be referred for underage drinking. In fact, *numerically* more Alaska Native (464) than white (432) girls are referred for this offense. They account for 51.3 percent of all referrals for minor consuming alcohol. While alcohol offenses were the second most frequent violation for white girls, it was the least frequent for African American girls. For both white and black girls, theft was the most frequent initial referral charge, but a larger *proportion* of African American girls than of white girls were charged with misdemeanor theft.

**Table 3. Most Serious Charge at First Referral for Eight Selected Charges, By Race**

	White girls			Alaska Native girls			African American girls			All girls	
	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%	N	%
Theft 3, 4	1	1,388	53.1 %	2	275	24.1 %	1	206	67.8 %	<b>1,869</b>	<b>46.0 %</b>
Underage drinking	2	437	16.7	1	464	40.7	5	4	1.3	<b>905</b>	<b>22.3</b>
Assault 3, 4	3	219	8.4	3	147	12.9	2	58	19.1	<b>424</b>	<b>10.4</b>
Criminal mischief 3, 4	5	159	6.1	4	84	7.4	3	16	5.3	<b>259</b>	<b>6.4</b>
Concealment of merchandise	4	166	6.4	5	67	5.9	4	5	1.6	<b>238</b>	<b>5.9</b>
Misconduct involving a controlled substance (all degrees)	6	98	3.8	8	21	1.8	4	5	1.6	<b>128</b>	<b>3.2</b>
Criminal trespass	7	80	3.1	7	36	3.2	4	5	1.6	<b>121</b>	<b>3.0</b>
Burglary	8	65	2.5	6	46	4.0	4	5	1.6	<b>116</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,612</b>			<b>1,140</b>			<b>304</b>		<b>4,060</b>	



The second hypothesis which can be examined using Table 3 is the stereotype that African American girls are more likely than girls of other races to be charged with crimes against persons. While the proportion of African American girls initially charged with assault (19.1%) is higher than that for Alaska Native girls (13.6%), this difference is not significant. Another stereotype which is not borne out by this data is that African American girls would be more likely to be referred for drug violations. Although the numbers are small, white girls are clearly more likely to be referred for drug offenses; 3.9 percent of white girls in the sample were referred for drug offenses, and they accounted for 76.6 percent of all drug-related referrals of females. Only 1.9 percent of Native girls were referred for drugs and only 1.6 percent of African American girls were. According to this data African American girls are the *least* likely of Alaska girls to be referred for drug offenses.

Regional variations in referrals must be examined in a state as large and diverse as Alaska. Approximately half of the state's population lives in Anchorage and the remainder is widely scattered over a large land mass. In order to address regional differences, we used the three DFYS regions, Northern, Southcentral, and Southeastern, and, because Anchorage dominates the Southcentral region and Fairbanks the Northern region, we treated these two cities separately. It is very possible for either to skew the results for their regions.

The Northern DFYS region consists of northern and western Alaska and has a larger proportion of Alaska Natives than the other DFYS regions do. With Fairbanks excluded, the general population is about 80 to 85 percent Native. Southcentral, excluding Anchorage, is approximately 85 percent white. While Southeast has a very large Caucasian population, the Alaska Native population is a larger percentage of the total there than in Southcentral.

It is important to note that African American youth are primarily found in the two cities that we treat separately from their regions. Together Anchorage and Fairbanks accounted for 93.2 percent of all African American girls referred; Anchorage accounted for 71.9 percent (N=246) and Fairbanks for 21.3 percent (N=73).

Offense data by race is shown for each region in Table 4. We wanted to control for offense severity, and therefore report in Table 4 only those eight offenses which occurred most frequently.

Limiting the offenses to these eight assures that we will not be comparing an unequal fight with murder in the personal crime category for example. All charges involving crimes against persons are misdemeanor assault.

Because many in the Alaska Native community view alcohol use and abuse very seriously, we might expect the region with the largest proportion of Native villagers to view drinking by youth very seriously and to refer many girls for this behavior. Of the 471 girls referred in the Northern Region for the eight selected offenses, 268, or 56.9 percent, were referred for minor consuming alcohol. Fifteen of the girls were white, the remainder Native. Although there were only 31 non-

**Table 4. Regional Distribution by Selected Charges, By Race**

	<u>White</u>		<u>Alaska Native</u>		<u>African American</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Northern Region</b>						
Theft 3, 4	1	3.4 %	19	4.3 %	2	100.0 %
Underage drinking	15	51.7	253	57.5	–	–
Assault 3, 4	5	17.2	61	13.9	–	–
Criminal mischief 3, 4	2	6.9	37	8.4	–	–
Concealment of merchandise	1	3.4	19	4.3	–	–
Misconduct involving a controlled substance (all degrees)	–	–	5	1.1	–	–
Criminal trespass	3	10.3	15	3.4	–	–
Burglary	2	6.9	31	7.0	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>		<b>440</b>		<b>2</b>	
<b>Southcentral Region</b>						
Theft 3, 4	186	30.2 %	17	13.1 %	2	25.0 %
Underage drinking	171	27.8	68	52.3	2	25.0
Assault 3, 4	53	8.6	17	13.1	4	50.0
Criminal mischief 3, 4	49	8.0	8	6.2	–	–
Concealment of merchandise	58	9.4	3	2.3	–	–
Misconduct involving a controlled substance (all degrees)	29	4.7	6	4.6	–	–
Criminal trespass	39	6.3	5	3.8	–	–
Burglary	30	4.9	6	4.6	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>615</b>		<b>130</b>		<b>8</b>	
<b>Southeast Region</b>						
Theft 3, 4	53	14.1 %	19	9.8 %	2	28.6 %
Underage drinking	174	46.3	95	49.2	–	–
Assault 3, 4	45	12.0	23	11.9	1	14.3
Criminal mischief 3, 4	22	5.9	5	2.6	–	–
Concealment of merchandise	55	14.6	39	20.2	3	42.9
Misconduct involving a controlled substance (all degrees)	16	4.3	3	1.6	–	–
Criminal trespass	9	2.4	5	2.6	1	14.3
Burglary	2	0.5	4	2.1	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>7</b>	
<b>Anchorage</b>						
Theft 3, 4	936	75.5 %	172	70.8 %	176	75.2 %
Underage drinking	43	3.5	9	3.7	–	–
Assault 3, 4	80	6.5	22	9.1	36	15.4
Criminal mischief 3, 4	69	5.6	21	8.6	11	4.7
Concealment of merchandise	28	2.3	5	2.1	–	–
Misconduct involving a controlled substance (all degrees)	41	3.3	5	2.1	4	1.7
Criminal trespass	20	1.6	7	2.9	2	0.9
Burglary	23	1.9	2	0.8	5	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,240</b>		<b>243</b>		<b>234</b>	
<b>Fairbanks</b>						
Theft 3, 4	208	59.4 %	47	35.3 %	36	57.1 %
Underage drinking	32	9.1	39	29.3	2	3.2
Assault 3, 4	36	10.3	24	18.0	15	23.8
Criminal mischief 3, 4	17	4.9	13	9.8	5	7.9
Concealment of merchandise	24	6.9	1	0.8	2	3.2
Misconduct involving a controlled substance (all degrees)	16	4.6	2	1.5	1	1.6
Criminal trespass	9	2.6	4	3.0	2	3.2
Burglary	8	2.3	3	2.3	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>		<b>133</b>		<b>63</b>	

Native girls referred, 48.4 percent of them were referred for drinking. An even larger proportion of Alaska Native girls was referred for this offense (57.5%).

In the Southcentral region drinking ranked slightly ahead of theft in frequency with 32.0 percent of all referrals for underage drinking and in Southeast region 46.7 percent of all referrals were for underage drinking.

We hypothesized that urban police would be much less likely than rural police to refer youth for this offense. Only 52 girls were referred for this offense in Anchorage, although it ranked fourth among the eight most frequent offenses there. In Fairbanks alcohol offenses ranked second in frequency. It is interesting that in each region (excluding the cities), regardless of the size of the Alaska Native population, underage drinking ranks first in frequency for Native girls.

In the cities, theft ranks as the most frequent offense for girls of all three races. In Anchorage, theft accounts for more than 70 percent of all referrals for each race; it is 75.5 percent for white girls, 74.1 percent for black girls, and 70.7 percent for Native girls. In Fairbanks, although theft is the most frequent of the eight offenses, it is less than 60 percent for white and black girls and only 35.3 percent for Alaska Native girls. In Fairbanks, drinking is a close second to theft in frequency for Native girls, with 29.3 percent of them referred on this charge. It seems possible that the stereotype that drinking is especially serious behavior for Native youth transcends population proportions.

In Southcentral more girls (241) were referred for alcohol offenses than for theft (203), though drinking ranked second for white girls. It seems that underage drinking is viewed as serious behavior in rural areas throughout the state regardless of the racial make-up of the population. Because such large proportions of Native and white girls are referred for drinking, it is possible to suggest paternalism, at least in the rural or suburban areas. That so few African American girls are referred for this offense probably results from their city residence.

Another hypothesis examined with the data from the multi-year PROBER sample was that minority females are more likely than white females to accumulate numerous referrals. Most of the girls appeared in the data set only once (69.7%). For white and African Americans youth the percentage with just one referral was above 70 percent (see Table 5). For Alaska Natives the picture was somewhat different—59.5 percent of them appeared only once in the data set.

Table 5. Referral Frequencies by Race

	White		Alaska Native		African American		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	2,196	74.1 %	769	59.5 %	240	70.2 %	3,205	69.7 %
2 to 4	653	22.0	396	30.7	86	25.1	1,135	24.7
5 to 9	104	3.5	107	8.3	15	4.4	226	4.9
10 or more	11	0.4	20	1.5	1	0.3	32	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,964</b>		<b>1,292</b>		<b>342</b>		<b>4,598</b>	

Only 32 girls accumulated ten or more referrals but the range went as high as 30. Alaska Natives were considerably more likely than either white or African American girls to be referred numerous times. The 20 Native girls in the 10+ category accumulated a total of 269 referrals. The 127 Native girls charged with at least 5 referrals were responsible for more referrals than the 769 girls with only one (N=962). Natives were also over represented in the 5-9 referral category (number of Natives was higher than the number of white girls). Not only did a larger percentage fall into this category but also the number...

Referral frequency for African American girls lags just slightly below whites among those with only one referral and just ahead of whites among those with 2-4 referrals. Clearly Alaska Native girls are more likely than either white or African American to be referred numerous times.

Another hypothesis that these data do *not* support, at least for girls, is that white youth are more likely than minority youth to have their cases dismissed at intake. Intake information was simplified for purposes of analysis to three possible outcomes: dismissal, adjustment, or petition. Conferences with parents, letters and informal probation were included in the adjustment category. The races are essentially similar in outcomes. Most of the charges were adjusted; adjustments were made for 87.3 percent of Natives girls, for 87.6 percent of African American girls and for 88.5 percent of white girls. The proportions are similar for the other outcomes with a slightly larger proportion of African American girls having charges dismissed and a slightly smaller proportion being petitioned as a delinquent (or for revocation). All-in-all the outcomes seem to be evenly distributed for girls.

The data from the large sample provided evidence for suggesting that, in Alaska, girls are more likely than boys to be referred to the juvenile system for alcohol offenses and that Native girls are more likely than either white or black girls to be referred for this offense. Although these differences are especially apparent in rural regions of the state with large Alaska Native populations the proportional difference holds in the other regions and in one of the separately treated cities (Fairbanks). In Anchorage the percentages of white and Native girls processed for underage drinking are essentially similar—and very small. African American girls were really rarely referred for substance abuse whether the substance was alcohol or drugs, but a larger proportion of them were referred for misdemeanor assault.

In the cities, white, black and Native girls were most often processed for theft, usually shoplifting and when misdemeanor theft is combined with concealment of merchandise—also often shoplifting—theft constitutes 77.2 percent of all referrals in Anchorage and 58.2 percent of all referrals in Fairbanks. In every location but Anchorage there are differences by race for theft as well as for the other referral charges. An effort was made to explore these differences using the small sample derived from the large one.

**Girls in the Small Subsample**

The intake files of forty girls were examined in the hope that details of their offenses and of their home and school lives could illuminate some of the racial differences noted in the analysis of four years of PROBER data. There were in the sample seventeen white girls, thirteen Alaska Native girls and ten African American girls. The girls were referred the first time for only five of the eight offenses identified as most frequently occurring offenses in the larger sample. These charges were, in order of frequency, theft (50.0%), underage drinking (25.0%), misdemeanor assault (12.5%), criminal mischief (7.5%) and burglary (5.0%). The breakdown by race is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Charge at First Referral, by Race**

	White girls		Alaska Native girls		African American girls	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Theft 3, 4	10	58.8 %	5	38.5 %	5	50.0 %
Underage drinking	5	29.4	5	38.5	0	0.0
Assault 3, 4	1	5.9	2	15.4	2	20.0
Criminal mischief 3, 4	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	30.0
Burglary	1	5.9	1	7.7	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>		<b>13</b>		<b>10</b>	

We also examined the number of referrals accumulated by the forty girls in the sub-sample and found minority females more likely than white girls to be referred more than once. Of the fifteen girls in the sample referred only once 60 percent were white; of the twenty-five girls with at least two referrals in their files, 68 percent were minority. Because we could not reproduce here the records of all forty girls in the sample we focused on the girls with five or more referrals assuming that girls with frequent contact with youth corrections were girls who were quite troubled. Only eight girls accumulated at least five referrals; six were Alaska Native and two were white. Their records are included in the appendix. Only one of the eight multiply referred girls had the minimum five referrals; one had thirteen, another fourteen.

It is interesting to note how young these girls were at their first referral. The youngest was nine, two were twelve years old, and one was thirteen. It is self-evident that the younger the girl is when she begins her delinquent career the more time available to continue the behavior. The nine-year-old provides a good example. She was an Alaska Native who lived in a village. Her initial referral was for burglary in the second degree and criminal mischief. With a companion she had entered a day care center through an unlocked door. She and her friend did considerable damage to the premises and stole some dolls. Her record did not show any further activity until she was 15 when she was charged with minor consuming after being found staggering near the waterfront. The

remainder of her referrals also included underage drinking. One included DWI, another included assault in the fourth degree (she kicked a police officer). Two of the referrals were for drinking only.

Drinking played a substantial role in the referral records of most of the Native girls with multiple referrals. In only one case where the girl was Native was there no mention of drinking in the record; this file had six referrals for theft and one for burglary. One girl accumulated 13 referrals over a two year period; ten of these included charges of minor consuming alcohol. The files revealed that some of these girls were referred to alcohol treatment programs, some more than once.

We decided to examine alcohol use and abuse more carefully. If alcohol was the reason for the referral or was mentioned in the police reports even when not charged the girl was placed in the alcohol involvement category. No African American girl appeared in the category but 76.9 percent of Alaska Native girls did and so did 47.1 percent of white girls in this sub-sample.

Details of police reports flesh out what the data set only lists. In this small sample the police reports make the behavior appear less rather than more serious. One African American girl who was charged with receiving stolen property was a 10-year-old who accepted a stolen can of soda from another student at her grade school. Another 13-year-old was charged with criminal trespass because she had gone into a restaurant from which she had previously been barred.

While the details of the referrals are revealing non-legal information, particularly family information, is of great interest to juvenile justice researchers. Because of this interest information about the girls' family lives was examined with some care. As noted previously some of the files were incomplete. Information on family and school was missing from the files of eight girls, five of whom were white and the rest Alaska Native. We hypothesized that family information would be missing from the files of girls with only one referral and this proved true for the five white girls. The files of the three Native girls without family information contained two to four referrals. The files of the black girls were complete.

Of those girls whose files contained family information (N=32), white girls were much more likely to live with two biological parents (47.1%) than were Alaska Native girls (7.7%). 70 percent of white girls lived with at least one biological parent compared with 45.2 percent of Alaska Natives. Several of the girls had rather chaotic lives moving from relative to relative with occasional residence in group homes, residential treatment programs, and in some cases detention in a state juvenile facility.

We found some correlation between problem families and the accumulation of several referrals. Every one of the five Alaska Native girls with five or more referrals came from a problem home. Only one did not have a history with Alaska Family Services. She lived with her father in a Native community. Another child lived with both parents and was the oldest of seven children. File notes

indicate that she had “minimal parental guidance” and there was some indication that she could be considered a child in need of aid (CINA). The other girls lived in obviously unstable situations. The child with the most chaotic living situation lived at different times with mother, father, grandparents, foster parents in a psychiatric facility, and in a residential group home and an alcohol treatment facility. Living with relatives and in foster placements was noted in the files of the other girls with multiple referrals.

One of the white girls in the category may have had mental/emotional problems. Her mother asked the state to take her because she was so unmanageable. The file indicates some alcohol abuse in the home. The girl had several placements including a brief period of institutionalization for psychiatric evaluation and finally institutionalization as a delinquent child.

The other frequently referred white girl lived with both parents who, the file noted, were “appropriate in expectations and attitudes.” The father enforced one of her restitution requirements. Of course the numbers in this sub-sample are too small to permit any definitive conclusions to be drawn, but in so far as they are a random, and representative, sample of the girls in the large data set, they do add to an understanding of race and delinquency in Alaska.

## **Conclusion**

The four years of female juvenile referrals in Alaska permit the testing of stereotypes about girls and about race. While it is true that the large number of referrals for underage drinking may support the paternalism hypothesis, it is also true that the extraordinary number of referrals of Alaska Native girls for this behavior may indicate a stereotype about Natives and an official perception—in both Native and non-Native communities—that alcohol use and abuse are more serious for Natives than for other races.

Although represented in proportions greater than their proportion of the general youth population in the state the smallest Alaska minority, African American girls, proved unlikely to be involved in referrals involving any substance abuse. Neither alcohol nor drugs appear very often in their referral histories. They are, however, more likely than either white or Native girls to be referred for assaultive behavior. Thus the data reinforce one racial stereotype about African Americans and totally negate the other.

Lengthy records appear to be associated with Alaska Natives who are, on average, younger than either white or African American girls at their first appearance in PROBER. More Alaska Native girls are referred in the northern region of DFYS than in any other region. They are therefore referred in small, rural, mostly Native communities where behavior is often obvious and the chances

of being caught are much higher than they would be in the larger cities. Village police officers may be more likely to deal formally with youthful law violators than are city police even when the behavior is noticed. In Alaska, disposition decisions for girls do not appear to be related to race. This is a very different finding from reports of studies in the lower forty-eight (e.g., Feyerherm 1995; Bishop and Frazier 1996; and others). It may be that the difference is in the gender of the subjects studied.

The small sub-sample which permitted close examination of the details of referrals and provided information about families and school suggests that family problems are related to girls' behavior problems. Details from police reports also suggest that the behavior of these girls may not be quite as serious as data points in the large data set would lead us to believe.



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**Appendix: Referrals of Female Habitual Offenders (5 or more referrals)****Alaska Native females**

Case #	Age at first referral	Referral date	Charge	Case #	Age at first referral	Referral date	Charge				
1	Age 12	Nov 1993	minor consuming alcohol	4	Age 15	Oct 1994	minor consuming alcohol, runaway				
		Aug 1994	criminal trespass			Dec 1994	theft, minor consuming alcohol				
		Feb 1998	assault in the fourth degree			Jan 1995	minor consuming alcohol, protective custody				
		Apr 1995	minor consuming alcohol			Feb 1995	minor consuming alcohol				
		Oct 1995	misconduct involving a controlled substance			Mar 1995	minor consuming alcohol				
		Nov 1995	criminal mischief in the third degree			Apr 1995	minor consuming alcohol				
		Dec 1995	forgery theft			Apr 1995	minor in possession				
		Jan 1996	criminal trespass			Aug 1995	minor consuming alcohol				
		Jan 1996	criminal mischief			Sep 1995	minor consuming alcohol				
		Jan 1996	probation violation			Mar 1996	driving while intoxicated				
		Mar 1996	probation violation			Apr 1996	assault in the fourth degree				
		Apr 1996	probation violation (leaving placement)			Jun 1996	assault in the fourth degree				
		Aug 1996	probation violation			Jul 1996	minor consuming alcohol, theft in the fourth degree				
		May 1997	probation violation								
		2	Age 16			Jan 1993	misconduct involving a controlled substance	5	Age 14	Jun 1994	theft in the fourth degree, criminal mischief in the third degree, minor consuming alcohol
						Apr 1993	Title 47			Jul 1994	criminal trespass, minor consuming alcohol
						Apr 1993	minor consuming alcohol, assault in the fourth degree			Oct 1995	burglary in the second degree
Jun 1993	intoxicated at home			Jun 1996	minor consuming alcohol						
Aug 1993	misconduct involving a controlled substance			Nov 1996	probation violation						
Oct 1993	misconduct involving a controlled substance										
Jun 1994	minor consuming alcohol										
Sep 1994	minor consuming alcohol										
3	Age 13	Jan 1994	theft	6	Age 9	May 1986	burglary in the second degree, criminal mischief				
		Jun 1994	shoplifting			Aug 1992	minor consuming alcohol				
		Jul 1994	theft from vehicle			May 1993	driving while intoxicated, minor consuming alcohol				
		May 1995	theft			Jun 1993	assault in the fourth degree, minor consuming alcohol				
		Aug 1995	burglary			Aug 1993	minor consuming alcohol				
		Oct 1995	shoplifting			Jan 1995	minor consuming alcohol				
		May 1996	shoplifting								

**White females**

Case #	Age at first referral	Referral date	Charge	Case #	Age at first referral	Referral date	Charge
1	Age 12	Jul 1993	runaway	2	Age 15	Mar 1992	minor consuming alcohol
		Jul 1993	assault in the fourth degree			Sep 1992	burglary
		Aug 1993	runaway			Sep 1992	warrant
		Jan 1994	burglary, assault in the second degree, assault in the fourth degree			May 1993	concealment of merchandise
		Feb 1994	runaway			Jun 1994	theft (receiving stolen property), minor consuming alcohol
		Mar 1994	assault in the fourth degree			Aug 1994	minor consuming alcohol
		Apr 1994	warrant				
		Apr 1994	attempted escape				
		Jul 1994	assault, burglary, theft ( <i>institutionalized</i> )				
		Jan 1996	misconduct involving a controlled substance, perjury				