Female Violence and Gender Gap Trends in Taiwan: Offender-Behavioral Changes or Net-Widening Enforcement Explanations?

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Abstract
Two long-standing explanations of converging violence gender gap trends in the United States are net-widening enforcement and offender-behavioral changes. We examine these explanations in an Asian context, democratic Taiwan. We use sex-specific arrests, conviction, and imprisonment statistics for violent offenses, 1989 to 2012, to identify whether Taiwanese gender gaps are converging across the criminal justice system. This study did not identify a female violent crime “wave” but mainly stability, failing to support the offender-behavioral change hypothesis. There is limited evidence of net-widening enforcement of felony assault and domestic violence, where disparate impacts on female arrest trends are identified solely for domestic violence.

Keywords
female, violence, crime trends, gender gap, gender convergence

Introduction
The question of whether (and why) the gender gap in crime is narrowing has interested criminologists and gender scholars for at least the past century (Parmelee, 1918; Pollak, 1950; Steffensmeier, Schwartz, Zhong, & Ackerman, 2005). Worldwide, concern continues to abound that females are more violent and, as such, the historical gender gap in crime might be narrowing or the character of female violence worsening (Schwartz,

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2013). This concern is especially poignant in rapidly developing or democratizing societies, where gender relations may be shifting and societal institutions becoming more gender egalitarian.

Some early and contemporary criminologists advocate the perspective that women will become increasingly crime-involved as society becomes more egalitarian and as women progress in public life (e.g., employment, education, domestic equity, political representation) (Adler, 1975; Fox, Levin, & Quinet, 2011; Simon, 1975). Other scholars are skeptical that progress toward gender equity would worsen female offending and, instead, investigate the validity of rising female arrest statistics to probe for consistency across offense types and against other data sources. In particular, they seek evidence of net-widening in the administration of justice where female offenders become more visible to law enforcement and/or more vulnerable to arrest because of greater official attention to minor forms of aggression and violence in private settings that females have always been involved in (Steffensmeier & Schwartz, 2004b). In addition, when male violence rates decline faster than female rates, the gender gap may seem to narrow, but it is not due to any objective increase by females. These two essential explanations for a narrowing gender gap—female offender-behavioral change and net-widening enforcement effects—have been tested extensively in the United States (Goodkind, Wallace, Shook, Bachman, & O’Malley, 2009; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, Zhong, & Ackerman, 2009; Steffensmeier et al., 2005), but only rarely in other places (e.g., LaFree & Hunnicutt, 2006; Schwartz, 2013).

Examining international or cross-national data to identify and understand trends in women’s violence across diverse social contexts broadens criminological knowledge about crime and the consequences of social and political change in a globalizing world. International research extends sociological knowledge about women’s and men’s violence and helps gauge the generality of Western theoretical approaches to understanding changes in the gender gap in non-Western societies. We question whether changes in offender-behavior or net-widening enforcement are generally supported as a viable explanation of any gender gap change in Taiwan, a prototypical Chinese society characterized as a collectivist state whose culture, norms, and values differ from those of Western individualistic states. Taiwan, with its collectivist cultural orientation but rapidly industrializing society and increasing status of women, is a strategic and well-suited international site for broadening the evaluation of gender gap trends.

To address this gap in knowledge about gender gap trends in varied international contexts and the generalizability of Western-based explanations for change, the current study examines two important explanations of gender gap trends in an Asian context, Taiwan. Taiwan is considered one of the Four Asian Tigers, alongside Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong (Barro, 1998; Gronning, 2009)—as an affluent state with a highly free and developed economy and high standard of living. After a period of intense social and political change, Taiwan became a democratic country where, over the 1990s to the present, society rapidly industrialized, the economy grew tremendously, and women were accorded a higher degree of liberation (Jou, 2011). Given that women were offered more “opportunity” and “equality” in the labor force and in
education under democratic political and social conditions, prominent liberation/emancipation theories posit that females might have increased their involvement in crime (Adler, 1975).

Indeed, consistent with the offender-behavioral change thesis, Taiwanese female arrest rates doubled over the past two decades, from 220 per 100,000 population in the early 1990s to 414 in 2012 (National Police Agency [NPA], 2013). Although females still comprise less than 10% of all those incarcerated, the number of women in Taiwan prisons in 2012 represent an 83% increase since 1991 (Ministry of Justice [MOJ], 2015). The escalating number of female inmates, and the steeper increase compared with males, has only begun to garner scholarly attention (Chen, Lai, & Lin, 2014; Chen & Lin, 2010).

Therefore, Taiwan serves as an interesting context in which to evaluate recent trends and these differing perspectives on gender gap changes in violence. Prior studies (Chang, 2002; Chen, 2000; Hsieh & Huang, 2008; Wu, 1995) demonstrated gender differences in Taiwanese criminal activity that are generally consistent with patterns in America, Canada, and many European nations (LaFree & Hunnicutt, 2006; Schwartz, 2013), yet few recent studies have examined changes in the gender gap in violent crime. At the same time, Taiwan policing transformed from inept, nepotistic, and corrupt to professional, service-oriented, and proactive, spurred partly by a new, well-educated, wealthy citizen-class that demanded attention to crime, human rights, and quality of life issues (Alarid & Wang, 2000; Gingerich, Chu, & Chang, 2011). Mobilizing law in this way often prompts a significant “discovery” of female offending that was more hidden prior to net-widening changes in the administration of justice (Schwartz, 2013).

This study has two specific objectives. First, we aim to address the primary question of whether Taiwanese gender differences in violent crime trends have converged by triangulating various measures of violent offending and using arrest, conviction, and incarceration data from the NPA and the MOJ for the years 1989 to 2012. The current study examines a variety of violent offenses, from the most serious and accurately measured crimes of homicide and robbery to aggravated assault; starting in 2000, we also track sex-specific trends in domestic violence arrests. Second, this study investigates offender-behavioral change explanations against accounts that rely on net-widening enforcement at early stages of the criminal justice system. If female violence has increased, this should be apparent across violent offenses and stages of the justice system. However, if the nature or extent of female violence has not changed, but law enforcement has become more proactive in intervening in interpersonal violence, the visibility or arrest-proneness of females may be escalated for assault because of more formal treatment for the sorts of offenses women have always been more prone to commit. In this case, the gender gap will narrow for flexibly defined offenses (e.g., assault vs. homicide) and at earlier stages in the administration of justice before females are filtered out of the system (e.g., arrest vs. conviction vs. imprisonment). We first identify the core theoretical concerns of the offender-behavioral change explanation and the net-widening enforcement perspective on gender gap change and then we apply these concerns to the Taiwanese context.
Offender-Behavioral Explanations and Net-Widening Enforcement Effects

An enduring research finding in criminology is the sizable sex difference in offending (Kruttschnitt, 2013; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). Regardless of time period or social context, criminologists have observed the female share to be lesser for serious, injury-producing violence; public altercations; or aggression against strangers but closer to gender-equal for violence that is less injurious, against family or intimates, or occurs in private settings (Steffensmeier, Zhong, Ackerman, Schwartz, & Agha, 2006). Although a virtual truism, criminologists have struggled to explain the gender gap and its variation over time and across place (Heimer, 2000; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2015).

Contemporary crime scholars recognize the utility of mainstream theories for understanding the gender gap but tend to use a gendered perspective that incorporates understanding of the organization of gender and the importance of contexts in which female and male offending occurs (Kruttschnitt, 2013; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2015). In particular, to explain gender gap changes, two meta-theories draw on mainstream criminological theories, but integrate and adapt them to recognize gendered lives and take into account extant empirical research on gender and crime. The offender-behavioral change thesis, rooted in a normative sociological theoretical tradition, anticipates real changes in female offending behavior as a result of economic, political, and social emancipation, changes which will be reflected in rising female rates and narrowing gender gap in criminal justice statistics. The social constructionist, net-widening enforcement, view is more critical of arrest statistics, instead suggesting any female arrest increases are due to changes in the application of the law, not to offender behavior. A key concern of our study is to assess support for the normative offender-behavioral change hypothesis or the net-widening enforcement hypothesis for gender gap trends in the Taiwanese context.

Offender-Behavioral Changes and the Gender Gap

No doubt as woman enters the field of industry formerly monopolized by man, and as she takes her part in politics . . . the percentage of female criminals will rapidly increase . . . and [she] will commit the crimes men commit. (Darrow, 1922, p. 78)

One popular long-standing perspective on gender and crime posits that female criminality will rise when opportunities, equality, and a liberation-orientation frees women from the burden of conventional sex roles and restrictions of gender norms: “Women have demanded equal opportunity in the fields of legitimate endeavours [and] a similar number of determined women have forced their way into the world of major crime” (Adler, 1975, p. 3). In other words, women’s liberation, increased education, and ascension within the labor force and in politics would cause females to take on masculine behavioral qualities, including violence, or provide additional opportunities for violence in the public sphere, like men have had. Social changes in the
organization of gender and underlying gender role expectations toward greater female freedoms and assertiveness might “masculinize” female behavior toward greater physical aggression (Fox et al., 2011). It has even been suggested that women would commit nontraditional masculine types of (violent) crime because “women are inherently as criminally capable as men” (Adler, 1975, p. 33). Adler anticipated increases in women’s rates of homicide, robbery, and other violent offenses. A slight variant from the emphasis on liberation ideology to explain the assumed relationship between the women’s movement and female criminality, Simon (1975) hypothesized that female crime rates would increase as social and economic roles changed and opportunities in traditionally male-dominated environments increased for women.

The notion that greater engagement in public life would expose women to more opportunities and develop further motivations for violent behavior is not new and draws from classical criminological theory (e.g., Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Merton, 1938; Sellin, 1938; Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967). Using social disorganization, anomie/strain, and subcultural theories of crime, Adler (1975) described how societal modernization, industrialization, and urbanization invoke female crime because these social forces decrease traditional gender roles, disintegrate family life, increase mobility and reduce social ties, and enhance the importance of goal attainment for women. During these times, girls and women experience a greater imbalance, face new strains, and are afforded more opportunities to learn new crime skills, engage in criminal subcultures, and utilize masculine styles to attain social status and solve interpersonal problems. Female adoption of male attitudes, traits, and prerogatives to raise their status in modernizing societies is thought to be a universal price of progress (Adler, 1975). Modern theorists continue to engage this perspective. Power-control theory (Hagan, Simpson, & Gillis, 1979; McCarthy, Hagan, & Woodward, 1999), premised partly upon self-control theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), links increased female delinquency to greater freedoms and lesser informal social controls of daughters raised in egalitarian families in which mothers work and family power dynamics are near-equal contrasted with girls raised in patriarchal families (e.g., stay-at-home mothers) who would be under greater supervision and less inclined to take risks.

Early empirical analyses based on the United States experience were not generally supportive of liberation or emancipation perspectives; nonetheless, these views remain popular among the public and some academics. Empirical studies of the time during the United States women’s movement (1960s and 1970s) found little change in female arrests for most forms of violence. For example, analyses of United States arrest statistics for 1960 through 1975 showed that, although the gender gap narrowed somewhat for robbery, it widened for aggravated assault and was unchanged for homicide and simple assault (Steffensmeier & Cobb, 1981). O’Brien (1999) reanalyzed gender gap arrest trends for a longer time period, 1960 to 1995, using an advanced time-series technique. The homicide gender gap significantly widened, the gender gap for aggravated assault did not change, and the robbery gender gap narrowed at a very low rate of change. Hindelang’s (1979) landmark studies assessing trends in female and male offending based on victim reports that are independent of criminal justice activities corroborated trends based on arrest statistics—no significant changes in the gender gap in violence.
However, a recent rise in female assault arrests in empirical assessments of women’s violence has revived interest in the offender-behavioral change hypothesis (Kruttschnitt, 2013). Lauritsen, Heimer, and Lynch (2009) identified a considerable narrowing of the gender gap in violent crime (e.g., robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault) in both official and unofficial data (i.e., Uniform Crime Report [UCR], National Crime Victimization Survey [NCVS]/National Crime Survey NCVS/NCS). Specifically, they indicated that the gender gap narrowed around the 1990s, which “was a period of economic growth in the United States” (Lauritsen et al., 2009, p. 389). Even though Lauritsen and colleagues could not definitively determine what factors were responsible for gender gap convergence, they did interpret results as consistent with offender-behavioral change.

**Net-Widening Enforcement Effects and the Gender Gap**

Despite the popular appeal of growing female involvement in public life as inevitably leading to increased female violence and other antisocial behaviors, skeptics argue that criminologists typically identify worsening, not improving, social conditions as related to upward crime trends (Belknap, 2007; Box & Hale, 1984; Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Shaw & McKay, 1942; Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2000). Moreover, much sociological work calls into question whether the fundamental organization of gender has changed, despite women’s greater involvement in public institutions. Scholars cannot deny that, in the United States and the United Kingdom, female assault arrests have increased at a rate that outpaces male increases; however, such increases have been explained as policy- or police-generated rather than the result of offender-behavioral change (Schwartz, 2013). As feminists gain legislative victories to recognize domestic violence and other gender inequalities, victim-reporting and law enforcement practices may change in ways that actually increase female chances of arrest too because the contexts under greater scrutiny are those in which women are more likely to deploy violence. Net-widening, or enhanced reporting and policing of minor violence, will uncover more female violence because the gender gap typically is narrower for less serious violence and interpersonal aggression in private settings.

Some prior studies contrast unofficial statistics on girls’ and women’s violence to official arrest statistics and conclude based on the lack of correspondence since the mid-1990s that official sanctioning may vary over time and across population subgroups (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, Zhong et al., 2009; Steffensmeier et al., 2005). In this case, female violence in the United States has become more visible as law enforcement treats more formally the minor sorts of violence in which women have always been more heavily represented. Women are more vulnerable to arrest for behaviors that, in the past, would have been ignored, handled informally, or resulted in lesser charges. Criminalizing minor forms of violence and proarrest policies for lower level violence, violence among intimates, and that in private/domestic settings will tend to affect female arrest rates more severely than male arrest rates. For example, Chesney-Lind and Paramore’s (2001) study of gender gap changes in adolescent robbery arrests showed that as
robery was redefined to include less serious behaviors (e.g., resisting detainment when caught shoplifting, purse-snatching), girls’ arrests increased at a faster rate than boys’ arrests. Likewise, Steffensmeier and colleagues’ (2005) study of official and unofficial national crime data for 1980 to 2003 identified a stable and nonconverged gender gap trend in arrests for most types of violent crime (see also Steffensmeier et al., 2006). Notably, the gender gap in arrests converged significantly for assaults, but not at all according to data sources independent of the criminal justice system, supporting the net-widening enforcement hypothesis.

Particularly germane here, Schwartz, Steffensmeier, and Feldmeyer (2009) advanced a logic to test for net-widening enforcement effects in the absence of longitudinal victim-based data by comparing gender gap trends for early with advanced stages of the criminal justice system. In the funnel analogy, numerous cases are filtered out of the criminal justice system from arrest to incarceration as offense seriousness and culpability are better assessed. If more numerous cases of questionable seriousness enter the system, more would be filtered out at conviction and imprisonment for not meeting historical thresholds for formal punishment. The authors acknowledge some spillover is likely to occur, but nonetheless, the gender gap will not narrow as much in conviction and imprisonment statistics compared with arrest. Schwartz and associate’s (2009) study demonstrated that the gender gap for serious violence (i.e., homicide, robbery) was unchanged across stages of the criminal justice system. In contrast, arrest gains for female felony assault diminished across stages, suggesting females’ greater vulnerability to arrest over time.

Whereas police may exercise little discretion in homicide (and robbery) cases, they are afforded more latitude in defining felony-level assault or in deciding to make an arrest when intervening in a domestic dispute. Classifying an assault as “aggravated” rather than misdemeanor requires that the accused attempted to or did cause serious bodily injury and/or used a deadly weapon. Discretion is sometimes involved in determining whether an implement was a deadly weapon (e.g., butter knife, thrown lamp) or an injury a serious one. Western penal philosophy has trended toward criminalizing lesser forms of violence and expanding definitions of felony-grade offenses by “charging up” milder forms of physical violence (Garland, 2001; Zimring, 1998). As part of this broader trend and coinciding with the contemporary women’s and victim’s rights movements, increased policing and proarrest policies in domestic disputes, which are meant to protect women against abusive partners, ironically also may disproportionately increase female chances of arrest for (domestic) assault (Miller, 2001, 2005).

Feminism and Female Criminality in Taiwan

Offender-behavioral change and net-widening enforcement perspectives have been widely tested in Western states, but rarely investigated in other societies (Schwartz, 2013). The “Taiwan miracle” of rapid economic growth and democratization and rising feminism and interest in female criminality in Taiwan offer an interesting context to explore these doctrines and contribute external validity thorough an Asian perspective on convergence in violent crime.
Feminism and Gender Convergence in Crime in Taiwan

Several key assumptions are at the center of offender-behavioral change explanations. One is that when female opportunities in public life grow, as evidenced by increased political representation, labor market participation, economic power, and educational attainment, women also will engage in increased violence. A second tenet is that women will be less restrained in their use of violence as they adopt less gendered ideologies or become more masculinized. Changes in women’s position in Taiwanese society began in the 1970s but hastened in the early 1990s when martial law was abolished.

In terms of feminism’s development in Taiwan, there have been three phases that correspond with changes to government administration. The first period was from the 1970s to early 1980s, about the same time Freda Adler (1975) published her book Sisters in Crime in the United States. Taiwan was still enforcing an intensive-policing strategy, known as Martial Law. Martial law, in effect in Taiwan for 38 years, granted political leaders wide-ranging powers to curb rights of assembly, free speech, and publication; conduct sedition trials of civilians by military courts; and take other measures ostensibly necessary to control the spread of communism. Despite the fact that very few women had the courage to devote themselves to the debate of public issues, politics, economics, and social affairs that had been conventionally controlled by men, Hsieu-Lien Lu (1977) published New Feminism, to introduce Western feminism and to promote women’s rights in Taiwan (Jou, 2011). In 1982, a group of women encouraged by Lu’s arguments established Awakening Magazine, to endorse gender equality, self-awareness for women, and to challenge gender differences in work and educational opportunities, social status, and gender roles (Wang, 1999). Nevertheless, under martial law, there were few productive results in terms of changing social policies, gender norms, sex roles, or status of women. As such, we do not focus on this historical period.

The second phase, the late 1980s to early 1990s, started when the government abolished martial law, loosened authoritarian controls, freed up media and journalism, and moved toward a democratic society (see Lai, Cao, & Zhao, 2010). In concert with these political changes was rapid economic development, urbanization, and industrialization (Tsai, 1989) and growth of an influential middle class, increased educational attainment, and expansion of social welfare programs. There was a surge of profit and nonprofit advocacy organizations that lobbied for policies to reduce gender inequality, sexual harassment at home and in the workplace, and submitted proposals to the government for institutional reforms (Jou, 2011; Wang, 1999). Evolving out of these changes, Taiwanese women were accorded some degree of liberation.

From the late 1990s to date, feminism in Taiwan has continued to thrive as Taiwanese women make real in-roads into political, economic, and social realms. Symbolizing some measure of advocacy organizations’ success, government passed several bills on gender equality in employment and education, as well as bills protecting women victims in divorce, domestic violence, and underage sex-trafficking (Lu, 2012). The percentage of Taiwanese women in Parliament increased from the 1970s
Female representation in Taiwanese politics and public administration is similar to or even higher than Singapore and other Asian countries (e.g., South Korea, Japan, China, India, the Philippines) (Sun, 2005), even though female representation is still lower than males in Taiwan, as in most Western states (Lu, 2012). Education and literacy levels of women, important markers of female empowerment, have steadily increased (Directorate-General of Budget, 2014). By about 1980, senior high school and college attendance rates equalized between the sexes and by the 1990s female attendance rates surpassed males, although substantial sex segregation in subject studied persists (Lu, 2012). Female labor force participation started rising in the 1970s (35%), climbed more steeply over the 1980s (45% by 1989), then stabilized around 50% by mid-2000 (Lu, 2012). Male labor force participation rates, although declining, still are higher, around 70%. Women’s legal, political, and economic position in Taiwanese society improved over the 1980s, with more remarkable changes in the late 1990s, although there is still much to be done toward gender equality. Calculating the United Nations’ overall Gender Inequality Index (GII), which measures gender inequality in empowerment (i.e., parliamentary seats and proportion of the population with at least a secondary education), reproductive health (i.e., maternal mortality and adolescent fertility), and in the labor market (i.e., female-to-male ratio of labor force participation) (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2013), the current Taiwanese GII ranking would place it as fourth most egalitarian among the 146 countries in 2011 (National Statistics, 2014). Taiwan now has the highest level of gender equality in Asia, falling closely behind Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark worldwide.

Along with increased gender equality, there is some evidence in Taiwan in favor of gender convergence in crime. Greater engagement by women in the criminal justice system coincided with the time when more educational, labor force, and political opportunities were offered to Taiwanese women. Wu (1995) examined gender difference in crime in Taiwan during these progressive economic, industrial, and democratic developments. Using the Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB) arrest data, he found that the overall gender gap in crime declined from 1979 to 1993, when the male-to-female ratio decreased from 8 to approximately 5. For violence in particular, the male-to-female ratio vacillated over time, but was generally higher in the early 1980s (ranging between 12 and 18) compared with the early 1990s (9-10 males per female offender). Wu concluded that (a) both male and female crime rates (violent, property, drug, and gambling) increased from 1979 and at an accelerated pace in the early 1990s but (b) female gains outpaced male gains, demonstrating a narrowing gender gap in Taiwan. However, Wu called for further studies because a valid explanation of the narrowing gender gap might include harsher law enforcement treatment of female offenders than in the predemocracy era.

As well, the more recently escalating number of female offenders and inmates in Taiwan relative to male offenders has garnered scholarly attention (Chen et al., 2014; Chen & Lin, 2010; Chu, 2013). In 2012, approximately one fifth of offenders in Taiwan were female (NPA, 2013). Even though male-predominance in crime prevails, more female offenders have been arrested over the past decades (NPA, 2013).
Moreover, prosecutor offices brought charges against 47% more female offenders in 2010 compared with 10 years ago (MOJ, 2013). In addition, the number of incarcerated female offenders has increased 83% since 1991 (MOJ, 2015).

Given the rapid economic development and growing gender equality in political and economic institutions in Taiwan since the 1990s, the offender-behavioral change hypothesis anticipates that changes in Taiwanese female offending are real. This study tests the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1 (Offender-Behavioral Change):** During periods of growing gender equality (and economic growth), the violence gender gap will narrow for all types (homicide, robbery, assault) and correspondingly across the criminal justice system (arrest to conviction to imprisonment).

**Patriarchy, Confucianism, and Stability in the Violence Gender Gap in Taiwan**

Taiwan, like many other societies, has cultural values that are patriarchal with masculine-centered structures in terms of resources, social life, capital attainment, and even crime (see Chiou, 2012; Jou, 2011; Messerschmidt, 1993). For example, patriarchal contexts, in which women experience an unequal distribution of power and privilege in work and family, have been identified in both Western and Eastern countries (Okin, 1998). In Chinese society, the cultural philosophic system of Confucianism has long been considered a mechanism of social control through its emphasis on social ethics and morality that profoundly influence social roles, duties, and gender obligations within the family and workplace to achieve societal goals of harmony and peace (Bayley, 1976; Chen, 1997; Dutton & Tianfu, 1993; Hughes, 1998).

Confucianism strongly supports patriarchal arrangements and reinforces androcentrism and masculinity (Koh, 2008; Rosenlee, 2006; Shim, 2001). In fact, Confucianism may be the most important factor underlying patriarchal arrangements in Asian society, in its encouragement of women’s dependence on men, socialization of women as inferior, and value placed on “virtue” and cultivating familial relationships (Deng, Vaughn, & Lee, 2003; Zhan, 1996). This ideology is reinforced through the simplest and most pervasive message—nán zhǔ wài nǚ zhǔ nèi (男主外女主内). Translating to something like “Men preside over the outside while women within” or “Men are breadwinners; women are homemakers,” this ideology conveys that males are in charge of decision making in the sociopolitical order and earning money to provide for needs, whereas females are primarily responsible for caretaking and housework (Patt-Shamir, 2009). Confucian ethics stress the need to balance male and female social roles (Li, 1994; Patt-Shamir, 2009; Rosenlee, 2006) by adhering to the essence of nán zhǔ wài nǚ zhǔ nèi (to play out their gender role obligations), even though these may be inconsistent with conventional notions of gender equality. Despite positive effects of Taiwan’s democratization on women’s rights against discrimination and freedom to raise their own social status (Lu, 1977), successful career women still serve as primary caretakers within their families (Jiang, 2009).
Under Confucianism, gender norms and role obligations constrain female violence through moral development, socialization (Gilligan, 1993; Zhan, 1996), and gendered interactions (West & Zimmerman, 2009) in which females should be tender, kind, and gentle through all the roles they may play throughout life as “good girl,” “lovely lady,” “good wife,” and “great mother” (Koh, 2008; Zhan, 1996). Inherently, these practices discourage women from engaging in violence while men would not be similarly constrained (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). Gendered paradigms of offending (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Chesney-Lind, 1989, 2001; Steffensmeier, 1980; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Steffensmeier, Allan, & Streifel, 1989) hold that risk preferences and motivations for violence and access to criminal opportunity are shaped by the organization of gender (e.g., gender norms, focal concerns, informal social control, physical differences). Male focal concerns and interactions continue to stem from culturally assigned provider/protector roles and stress dominance/control and individual achievement in the public sphere. By contrast, female focal concerns and interactions support nurturing, communal role obligations, and maintaining social relationships. These cognitive schemas shape gender ideologies and identities related to motivations for crime as well as gendered actions and interactions with others that provide opportunities for violence. Therefore, women are more likely to take risks in the domestic sphere and for reasons that are protective of emotional commitments or valued relationships whereas men take greater risks for status, power, monetary gain, or competitive advantage (Steffensmeier, Schwartz, & Roche, 2013).

The dominance of patriarchy in Taiwanese society, supported by Confucianism, has likely preserved the historical gender–crime relationship. Despite rather important sociopolitical changes and more egalitarian political and economic circumstances of modern women, the underlying organization of gender seems to have changed little. Therefore, women’s and men’s trends in violent behavior are expected to closely track one another (Wu, 1995). Even despite increased opportunities and changing gender roles for some, until there is more enduring change in cultural traditions that govern gender socialization, gendered interactions, and opportunities, there is unlikely to be much real change in the gender gap in violence.

If the underlying organization of gender has changed little despite large societal shifts, the conventional gender–crime relationship would remain unchanged. We examine the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2 (Unchanged Organization of Gender):** The gender gap will remain stable for all violent offenses and across stages of the criminal justice system.

**Potential Net-Widening Enforcement Effects on the Violence Gender Gap in Taiwan**

One can apply the issue of net-widening enforcement changes to female violent crime trends in Taiwan. It is beyond our scope to provide a full review of changes in the administration of justice after the lifting of martial law. However, we highlight important legislation and key changes in law enforcement that may increase Taiwanese women’s propensity to be arrested for assault. As in the United States, changes can be
broadly characterized by wider societal shifts in risk management strategies and preventive punishment philosophies and especially by greater criminal justice involvement in formerly private matters of interpersonal violence.

The 1990s and early 2000s was a time in Taiwan when deeply rooted ideas about domestic relations were seriously challenged. Ideas such as “the law never enters the door of a home” and “even good officials are incapable of determining disputes arising from household affairs” were slowly being supplanted by the notion that police and the law may play a role in preventing harm to loved ones (Lo, 2006, p. 149). Feminist activists and nongovernmental groups started to call upon the government to intervene in domestic affairs to address marital violence and child abuse (Chao, 2005). And, more generally, law enforcement in democratic Taiwan was taking on the tasks of preventing dangers, promoting welfare, and protecting security, including by addressing problems of interpersonal violence.

As part of the broader human rights movement, women’s rights advocates ultimately helped to pass new legislation to protect women’s safety (e.g., Sexual Assault Crime Prevention Act) (see Deng et al., 2003; Lu, 2012). Most pertinent here, the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA), drafted beginning in mid-1990s and passed in 1998, gave police the authority to intervene in formerly private domestic matters. Legal interventions in domestic violence incidents had been rarer (Chu & Sun, 2014), with officers more often mediating family-related incidents and encouraging reconciliation rather than levy legal sanctions. However, the passive role of law enforcement gradually changed over the 1990s to a more active one in concert with ideology of the women’s human rights movement, political pressures, and new legislation prompting law enforcement to view interpersonal violence as a violation subject to legal sanctions (Tang, Cheung, Chen, & Sun, 2002). Demand for law enforcement services escalated once domestic violence prevention centers and shelters were established to recognize and manage the problem of domestic violence (Chen, 2001). In response, police were trained to become familiar with the processes and more bureaucratized procedures for handling domestic violence as first responders (Chu & Sun, 2014). And, specialized domestic violence prevention officers were placed in each district to assist local officers in enforcing protection orders and policing domestic violence. This general shift in law and enforcement toward proactive and aggressive responses to violence, especially domestic violence, might have the unintended consequence of disparately escalating female arrest rates for assault, especially domestic violence, because private contexts are those in which women are more likely to enact aggression.

Building on prior net-widening enforcement research, the gender gap would narrow for more flexibly defined violence and at early stages of the criminal justice system.

**Hypothesis 3 (Net-Widening Enforcement Across Offenses):** The arrest gender gap will narrow for more flexibly defined assault offenses but not more reliably measured homicide and robbery offenses.

**Hypothesis 4 (Net-Widening Enforcement At Early Stages):** The assault gender gap will narrow at arrest but not at subsequent case-processing stages (conviction, imprisonment).
Method

Data

This study explores whether or not the gender gap in violent crime has narrowed from 1989 to 2012 and evaluates the empirical evidence to ascertain plausible explanations regarding the way in which female violent crime in Taiwan has changed over time. Data triangulation is a systematic way to evaluate how female violent crime has changed over time by assessing rates across diverse official sources of data and types of violent crime (Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009). The current study examined four types of violent crime, murder, robbery, aggravated assault, and domestic violence (when it started to be recorded in 2000). This study used arrest data from the NPA and conviction and incarceration data from MOJ in Taiwan.

The NPA publishes the Statistical Yearbook of Police Administration (SYPA). The SYPA, similar to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)’s UCR, is published annually and considered the most comprehensive resource for researchers, law enforcement, and members of the public who seek information on crime in the nation of Taiwan. SYPA categorizes number of arrests by type of crime, such as violent crime, property crime, drug abuse, gambling, and being intoxicated. The SYPA also makes available demographic characteristics on offenders (e.g., gender, age, region, occupation) and reports other crime-related information (e.g., clearance rates, number of victims).

In the Taiwanese system, data reporting is highly centralized and uniform, unlike their American counterparts for whom UCR participation is voluntary and reporting is through state-level offices by various paper- and computer-based methods. Local police agencies in Taiwan are responsible for collecting information on investigation, suspect, and arrest for various types of crime in their jurisdiction. Monthly reporting to NPA through an internal computational reporting system is mandatory and police officers receive computer training to enhance compliance and accuracy of the reporting system. The statistics office of NPA audits monthly crime reports and quarterly performance reports from local agencies, manages crime information database and reporting systems, and consistently analyzes and publishes these statistics.

The MOJ is responsible for maintaining and updating the Corrections Information System in Taiwan and publishes the Yearbook of Statistics of Justice (YSJ) to provide various diverse research opportunities. In this study, both conviction counts and prison admission counts are extracted from the YSJ, which covers all types of criminal convictions, sentence lengths, courts and facilities information, and defendant characteristics, such as sex and age. We use data on female and male convictions and new admissions for murder, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Analytic Plan

This study replicates two essential algorithmic methods that Steffensmeier and associates (Steffensmeier et al., 2005; Steffensmeier et al., 2006) identified in examining the gender gap. These two formulas were used by previous studies with respect to gender
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convergence in crime rates in Western study sites (Schwartz, 2008a, 2008b, 2013; Schwartz & Rookey, 2008; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009; Steffensmeier et al., 2005; Steffensmeier et al., 2006), but to our knowledge, relatively few replications have been undertaken in Asian studies.

The first of the two algorithms is sex-specific arrest rates where the female arrest rate notes female violent arrests per 100,000 women ages 12 to 64 in the population. Female (and male) arrest rates indicate the changing level of violent arrests. Female (and male) violent conviction and incarceration rates are calculated by this formula as well:

\[
\text{Female Violent Arrest Rates} = \left( \frac{\text{Number of Female Violent Crime Arrests}}{\text{Total Female Population at Risk}} \right) \times 100,000
\]

Here, we will not only pay attention to how female and male violent crime rates may vary over time but also monitor whether there are diverging trends or larger declines in male than in female offending (Heimer, 2000; Lauritsen et al., 2009; O’Brien, 1999), particularly for male assault and robbery (Schwartz, Steffensmeier, Zhong et al., 2009), that would disproportionally escalate the female percentage of offending.

Another measure in this analysis is the female percentage of violent offending, which indicates proportion of the total number of arrests comprised of females:

\[
\text{Female Percentage of Violent Offending} = \left( \frac{\text{Female Arrest Rate}}{\text{Male Arrest Rate} + \text{Female Arrest Rate}} \right) \times 100\%
\]

The female percent may increase (and the gender gap may narrow), when female rates increase more steeply than male rates or when male rates decline at a faster pace than female rates. Examining whether the gender gap in violent crime is experiencing convergence, divergence, or is trendless can enhance understanding of changes in the female percentage of violent offending.

By comparing the female percentage of violent arrests, conviction, and incarceration across types of violent crime, one can assess whether the evidence favors Adler’s (1975) prediction of an increase in female violent offending associated with democratization versus the counter-hypothesis of little to no change in the violent crime gender gap over time.

Results

Violent Crime Arrest Trends in Taiwan

The first step is to examine arrest rates for various types of female violence. Figure 1 presents male (Panel A) and female (Panel B) arrest rates per 100,000 male/female
population for various types of violence over the recent two decades. Consistent with previous studies, males remain dominant in violent crime and exhibit higher arrest rates than females for all offenses (Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009). On average, male violent crime arrest rates for homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault were, respectively, approximately 16 times, 13 times, and 5 times higher than female violent crime arrest rates.

Figure 1. Taiwanese male and female arrest rate trends by violence type, 1989-2012.
In terms of trends over time, female and male homicide and robbery rates declined. Male homicide and robbery arrest rates decreased dramatically, by an estimated 60% since the late 1990s. Female homicide and robbery arrest rates also decreased, albeit at a slower rate. Female homicide rates dropped under one per 100,000 and female robbery rates decreased by half (four to two per 100,000). Because of more marked male declines, the female percent arrested for homicide increased modestly from 4% to 6% and for robbery from 4% to 8% (Figure 2).

In contrast to declines in homicide and robbery arrests, both female- and male-aggravated assault arrest rates increased markedly over time starting around 1994. Male-aggravated assault arrest rates climbed sharply from about 45 to 160 per 100,000; female rates increased from about 10 to 30 per 100,000. Long-term changes, and even short-term fluctuations (2002-2007), in female- and male-aggravated assault arrest rates largely mirrored one another. The female percent remained stable, increasing only modestly from 16% to 18%. The stable gender gap means that any female rise in aggravated assault arrests matched in timing and extent to a male rise.

The balance of evidence based on arrest data shows little change in the gender gap for serious violence in Taiwan during the period after democratization. Any narrowing of the gender gap for the most serious violent crimes (homicide, robbery) was due to steeper male declines. In part, female rates cannot go much lower. Yet, there was evidence of marked change in arrests for serious assaultive violence, but any net-widening law enforcement changes that increased arrest rates did so similarly for females and males.
The next step in our analysis involves comparing changes in the violence gender gap across significant stages of the criminal justice system. Our approach is to triangulate information on gender gap trends across case-processing stages to assess consistency and probe for evidence of net-widening. This approach assumes that violent offending statistics produced at later case-processing stages are more consistent markers of long-term trends in female violence and the gender gap compared with statistics produced at the entry stage because offenders tend to be successively “screened out” of the criminal justice system from arrest to conviction to imprisonment (Mosher, Miethe, & Hart, 2011; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009).

Figure 3 presents the female proportion of violence from the late 1990s to date across criminal justice institutions recording arrest, conviction, and incarceration. Panel A shows gender gap trends in homicide, Panel B for robbery, and Panel C for aggravated assault.

In general, gender gap trends in conviction and imprisonment were parallel to gender gap trends in arrest, and each violent offense displayed trends of almost no change even though there were slight variations. For homicide, trends in the female percentage overlapped for arrest, conviction, and incarceration, each marginally increasing from about 4% to 6% or 7% female. The parallel trends suggest little change in female violent behavior or in case processing. The similar level of female homicide offenders for arrest, conviction, and incarceration indicates that females are not diverted from the criminal justice system in greater numbers compared with men.

Gender gap trends in robbery arrests parallel trends in conviction and incarceration. Each narrows slightly with the female percent of robbery arrests increasing from about 6% to 8%, convictions from 3% to 5%, and incarcerations from 1% to 4%. That the female percent is lesser (i.e., the gender gap widens) at each successive stage of the criminal justice system suggests that female offenders are filtered out of the criminal justice system somewhat more than males. Still, gender gap changes and any widening of the gender gap across stages are modest.

For aggravated assault, where female and male arrest rates both increased, the gender gap showed mostly stable, parallel trends across arrest, conviction, and incarceration. For arrest, the female percent fluctuated between 16% and 18%; for conviction, the female share hovered between 14% and 16%; and for imprisonment, the female percent was a much lower 4% to 6%. Essentially there was no change over time in the gender gap for assault across arrest, conviction, or incarceration.

In contrast to steeply rising arrest rates for both sexes, aggravated assault conviction and imprisonment rates showed little increase for either sex (not shown, available upon request). Male convictions increased slightly from about 65 per 100,000 men in the early 1990s to about 75 in the next decade; female convictions increased from about 11 to 14 per 100,000 females. Imprisonment rates increased only incrementally and remained rare for both sexes—10 per 100,000 men and less than one per 100,000 women. These patterns suggest gender-neutral net-widening arrest tendencies with limited spillover to subsequent criminal justice stages.
Figure 3. Gender gap trends across the criminal justice system: Trends in the female percentage of arrests, convictions, and imprisonments for types of violence, 1989-2012.
There is no significant evidence to support the idea that females in particular were targeted by law enforcement for any of the violent offenses, including aggravated assault. The results did not support sex-specific effects of net-widening enforcement, whereby gender gap convergence would be limited to assault arrests and not later case-processing stages or more serious violence. Overall, findings did not confirm an offender-behavioral change hypothesis because there was no support for female-to-male convergence in violent offending from the late 1990s to date. Rather, evidence supports a very stable relationship between gender and violent crime in Taiwan, at least as measured in official data across stages of the criminal justice system.

Supplemental Analysis: Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Trends in Taiwan

In the United States, evidence of net-widening enforcement that disparately affects female arrest rates is more or less confined to minor assaults, particularly those in domestic settings (Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009; Steffensmeier & Schwartz, 2004b). Although Taiwanese crime data do not track misdemeanor assault trends, domestic violence offenses started to be tracked in police data beginning in 2000, offering a unique opportunity for this study to assess changes in the domestic violence gender gap in arrest from 2000 to 2012.

Figure 4 demonstrated that rates of males and females arrested for domestic violence both increased considerably over time (see Panel A). Between 2000 and 2012, male and female arrest increased from 50 to 481 per 100,000 males and from two to around 60 per 100,000 females. Because female increases outpaced those of males, the gender gap narrows (i.e., female share rises) for domestic violence arrestees. The female share triples, from 4% to 12% (see Panel B).

To sum, supplemental findings for domestic violence trends over the most recent decade showed increased rates of arrest for domestic violence. Females and males both had greater contact with the criminal justice system over time for domestic violence, but this increase was particularly salient for women. Although domestic violence offenses dealt with by law enforcement increasingly involved female arrestees, male arrest rates were persistently higher than female rates. On average, male domestic violence arrest rates were roughly 11 times those of females (see Figure 4, Panel B), and undoubtedly these are low estimates of offenses known to police. Nonetheless, historical gender difference in violent crime persisted.

Discussion

The current study sheds light on whether female violent crime in Taiwan has changed over time since democratization, and importantly, whether or not the gender gap in violent crime has narrowed from 1989 to 2012. In replicating major contemporary studies (Schwartz, 2013; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009; Steffensmeier et al., 2005; Steffensmeier et al., 2006) from an Asian perspective, our study broadens knowledge about gender and crime by studying an international collectivist context
and testing the generality of theoretical approaches to understanding changes in the gender gap in this diverse cultural context. The present study found neither a female violent crime wave in Taiwan nor convergence of homicide, robbery, or aggravated assault rates for males and females. There was inadequate evidence to support offender-behavioral change in democratic Taiwan. Findings were consistent with historical gender differences in offending (Morris, 1964; Pollak, 1950; Steffensmeier, 1980), in which Taiwanese (a) male violence occurred much more often than female violence in

Figure 4. Arrest rate trends and gender gap trends in domestic violence, 2000-2012.
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terms of varieties, frequency, and severity, and (b) sex differences in crime were narrower for more minor violence but rather large for serious violence (e.g., assault vs. homicide).

Findings revealed Taiwanese arrest rates decreased considerably for homicide and robbery in the last 20 years, although there were marginally greater male declines than for females, paralleling gender and violence trends in the United States (Lauritsen et al., 2009; O’Brien, 1999; Rennison, 2009; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, Zhong et al., 2009; Steffensmeier et al., 2005). Moreover, the current study found that Taiwanese female violent crime rates were relatively low compared with males, under 10% on average (homicide = 5%-7%; robbery = 7%-9%) compared with 10% or greater in the United States and other Western nations (Schwartz, 2013; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009). Confucian philosophy emphasizes social ethics, morality, and duties for maintaining social cohesion in communities. The emphasis on morality and sense of duty may especially constrain female violent offending (Gilligan, 1993) in Asia, where females are relatively more conservative than males under Confucian values (Zhang, Lin, Nonaka, & Beom, 2005).

With regard to aggravated assault, there is evidence of net-widening enforcement practices, where more Taiwanese of both sexes have been arrested over time. That conviction and imprisonment rates do not undergo a corresponding rate increase further supports a net-widening interpretation. However, net-widening enforcement effects seem rather gender-neutral in Taiwan. The gender gap in assault remains unchanged across all stages of the criminal justice system, from arrest to imprisonment. This is in contrast to the United States, where female the gender gap for assault arrests converged to some extent (Schwartz, Steffensmeier, & Feldmeyer, 2009; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, Zhong et al., 2009).

Potentially blurring the image of Taiwanese gender gap convergence in violent offenses are that (a) female-aggravated assault rates increased and (b) a significant drop in male homicide and robbery arrest rates inflated the female proportion of violent crime (i.e., narrowed the gender gap). However, male-aggravated assault rates climbed at a pace comparable with female rates and there was no further evidence across the administration of justice of an increase in female-aggravated assault convictions or incarcerations to support the offender-behavioral change hypothesis. Overall, female and male rates tended to move in tandem and there was no sizable change in the female-to-male ratio across types of violent crimes examined in the current study. Therefore, evidence favors the conclusion that there is little change in the gender gap for any violent offense (homicide, robbery, aggravated assault) across various stages of criminal justice (arrest, conviction, incarceration). The “going rate” (see Walker, 2011) was found to be stable across stages of the criminal justice system in Taiwan, in accordance with Schwartz’s (2013) study, where there was no unique growth in female cases within criminal justice institutions of a number of countries. Our findings were also consistent with Chen and Lin’s (2010) study of Taiwan, where female violent arrest trends (2000-2009) slightly increased but remained low compared with male violent arrests, including for aggravated assault. Chen and Lin also identified female
arrest increases for several other offenses, namely, drugs, larceny, and fraud. There is merit to future study of Taiwanese crime and justice trends for other offenses, particularly drug arrests that may drive overall increases in Taiwanese female imprisonment rates (MOJ, 2015).

In examining more private forms of violence, namely, domestic violence, there is evidence of net-widening enforcement effects that had sex-disparate effects on female arrest trends in Taiwan. Female and male domestic violence arrest rates both increased since statistics began to be collected in 2000, but the fact that the female percentage increased (from 4% to 12%) means females outpaced males in growing arrests. Passing the DVPA, the first domestic violence statute in Taiwan, signaled official recognition of more than a decade of work by women’s groups to demonstrate that interpersonal violence was a serious problem requiring government interventions to aid victims (Lo, 2006). The role of the police shifted from mediators of conflict to active responders expected to take aggressive official actions, similar to domestic violence responses in Western societies (Chu & Sun, 2014). As in the United States, and given gendered patterns of offending, an unintended consequence of casting a wider arrest-net for domestic violence may be to uncover more female violence.

The law “also aims at protecting the equality of both genders” (Lo, 2006, p. 151), suggesting a gender-neutral approach to policing might contribute to domestic violence arrest trends. And, with rising numbers of female police officers in the field, their preferences for more aggressive responses to domestic violence may be altering response outcomes (Chu & Sun, 2014). Laws governing previously private forms of violence also changed in important ways that might affect law enforcement responses. Further research is needed to assess how the law has changed to focus on domestic violence as a serious problem in Taiwan and whether this shift in focus may have differently affected the formal treatment of females and males engaged in interpersonal violence. Future research should examine direct and indirect influences of legal policy (DVPA) and law enforcement changes on female and male domestic violence arrest trends and changes in the gender gap. Without further testing using a time-series intervention and longer data series, we do not know what legal, sociopolitical, or other factors such as economic marginalization/inequality have affected gender gap trends in Taiwan. Our study lays the groundwork for future inquiry about effects of policy change on arrest trends and any unintended disparate consequences on one sex over the other (Schwartz & Rookey, 2008).

Although it is beyond our scope to fully compare United States and Taiwan gender gap trends in violence, a topic of future study, we highlight some similarity across these two diverse contexts, but important differences as well. Namely, similarities included the lack of gender gap change for serious violence (homicide, robbery) contrasted with a narrowing gender gap for private or minor forms of violence. That Taiwan also exhibited rising female (and male) domestic violence arrest rates and a narrowing gender gap for this formerly private form of violence perhaps should not be surprising based on two accounts: (a) Taiwan’s domestic violence laws were modeled after the United States (Chao, 2005) and (b) gender gap patterns in offending are similar across cultures, so increased attention to privatized forms of violence will tend to
uncover the types of violence women are more apt to commit. However, an important difference, unlike in the United States, in Taiwan the gender gap for aggravated assault arrests did not narrow, even though female arrest rates increased. Future studies should devote attention to comparing gender gap trends and drivers of those trends across national contexts to test the generalizability of gender gap theories and identify their scope conditions (Steffensmeier et al., 1989). Also useful would be localized studies of the types of cases that comprise the growing number of felony assault and domestic violence arrestees of both sexes in Taiwan and the United States. Both sorts of studies would inform about the factors fueling the gender-neutral rise in felony assault arrests contrasted with the greater female-to-male rise in domestic violence arrests over the past decade or two.

Without access to victim- or self-reports of violence that are independent of the criminal justice system, the current study cannot adequately rule out that aggravated assault and domestic violence in Taiwan have actually increased, especially domestic violence by females. In a state with vastly changing female rights, gender equality, and economic independence, Taiwanese females have to adjust to the strain between family and work roles while becoming increasingly concerned with independent financial and social status. Although Confucian ethics generally suppress female violence, female assaults against family might increase because of greater female strain resulting from difficulties balancing the roles between work and home. Given female strain might result from women not receiving the understanding and support of their family (Chiou, 2012; Wu, 2009; Xie, Heimer, & Lauritsen, 2012), women may be more likely to turn to violence when close interpersonal ties with families and loved ones are disrupted (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014). This is an alternative interpretation than that of Steffensmeier and associates (Steffensmeier et al., 1989; Steffensmeier & Schwartz, 2004a) to explain changes in the gender gap for less serious violence.

Intensified family conflict may also occur because males have long been cultivated into a Confucian culture with social standards that endorse patriarchy (Luo & Yang, 2005; Yeh, Huang, & Chiu, 2006), the display of androcentricity and masculinity at home and in the workplace, and dominance over women. Given this “dominant” characteristic, males might fail to adapt and to understand the differences between the Chinese-oriented conventional female roles they expect and the contemporary liberal female roles where their wives work outside the home and depend less on them (Chen, 2009). Therefore, gender role conflict in recent years may explain not only an increase in female domestic violence but also an increase in the amount of male intimate partner violence. Violent incidents were more likely to be triggered when male partners perceived that females did not fulfill the standards of nán zhǔ wài nǚ zhǔ nèi, such as an insufficiency of housework, nursing, and child care as they expected (Chiou, 2012). Increased intimate partner violence could be interpreted as backlash (see Chesney-Lind, 2006), in which men try to preserve dominance within the family and society when they perceive rising feminism to potentially threaten their social status. Studying male perceptions of family values, couched in terms of Confucianism, may help understand precursors of domestic violence in Taiwan. Meso-level studies of gendered interactions related to domestic violence would be instructive.
Conclusion

The current study set out to assess whether female violence rates increased and whether the gender gap narrowed in Taiwan following democratization (1989-2012). Evidence on female violence trends and any gender gap changes were evaluated in the context of offender-behavioral change versus net-widening enforcement changes in Taiwan. This study drew upon official Taiwanese police data to track arrests and MOJ data on convictions and incarcerations to compare sex-specific rates and gender gap trends in homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault across the criminal justice system. Domestic violence arrests were tracked starting in 2000. In the current study, we found no support for unique offender-behavioral change in female violence following democratization in Taiwan. Rather, Taiwanese violence trends demonstrated stable sex differences in violent offending patterns. However, our findings demonstrated limited support for net-widening arrest practices surrounding felony assault and domestic violence offenses in Taiwan. Arrests of both sexes increased over time for felony assault, but not more so for one sex than the other. Arrests for domestic violence also increased for both sexes, but disproportionately for females, begging further investigation.

Despite our exploratory scope, this study contributes to what is known about gender convergence in violence rates across the criminal justice system in Taiwan and the plausibility of applying offender-behavioral change versus net-widening enforcement explanations to an Asian context. This approach makes a significant contribution to the knowledge base that will serve as a continuation point for more detailed work in the future, such as engaging a comparative perspective between the United States and Taiwan in terms of historical and contemporary gender differences in crime.

In addition, this study contributes to cross-cultural research that broadens the picture of female violent crime and social control trends through exploring international data rather than examining the conventional context and data of the United States. Analyzing multifaceted violent crime data for Taiwan, where women’s status measurably improved as the nation rapidly democratized and industrialized, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the generalizability of theoretical explanations of changes in the historical gender gap in violence. In an increasingly globalized world, researchers should undertake international and cross-national comparative studies on various topics related to gender, crime, and social control as an opportunity to extend mainstream criminology’s understanding of crime patterns in other non-Western settings with collectivist, or otherwise nonindividualistic, states to enhance explanatory power of criminology and feminist literatures. Thus far, evidence does not support the worldwide concern that the historical gender gap in violence is narrowing or the character of female violence worsening, even in rapidly developing and democratizing societies undergoing profound changes in gender systems. Rather, in Taiwan, as in the United States, the gender gap in violence remains sizable and shows no signs of convergence.

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Notes
1. The United Nations adopted the Gender Inequality Index (GII) measurement in 2010. Although Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations (and thus not included in the United Nations’ official report), Taiwan’s Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS) calculated the United Nations’ measure and provided the Taiwanese GII ranking (Liu, 2013).

2. A recent study (Dawson & Straus, 2011) of self-reported minor delinquency by a sample of university students in Taiwan and other countries showed female students in Taiwan reported among the highest prevalence of minor offending (theft, stealing money from parents, attacked someone, threatened/hit parents), about one-third compared with the median of around 17%. Unfortunately, due to missing gender equality information, Taiwan was not included in the subsequent analysis, but the general finding across 24 other nations was a weak association between gender equality and a narrower gender gap in minor crime.

3. Changes in the administration of justice after martial law were not immediate, but ultimately the Taiwanese criminal justice system was overhauled and many statutes amended. Significant changes included (a) adopting an adversarial system with active roles for prosecutors and defenders to stem judicial power and discretion and (b) better protecting human rights of those in the criminal justice system (e.g., curbing harsh police interrogation tactics, illegal searches; giving arrestees notice of their rights; abridging prosecutor’s detention authority) (Wang, 2011).

4. We selected the years 1989 to present to examine gender convergence in violent crimes because this period captures the simultaneous development of feminism (Lu, 1977), democratization, and a thriving economy in Taiwan (Lai, Cao, & Zhao, 2010). As well as being an appropriate period of observation to assess gender convergence, reliable data are available across this time frame for each source of crime statistics.

5. We do not examine the serious violent offense of sexual assault because it is so strongly male-dominated. The basic statutory definitions of violent crime (homicide, robbery, aggravated assault) in Taiwan share many similarities with the Index crimes identified in the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), but slightly differ in some notable ways. For example, aggravated assault in Taiwan includes incidents with serious injuries and cases in which a gun or other weapon was used forcefully to intimidate or harm others. This closely matches the UCR definition, where “aggravated assault is an unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury” (https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2010/crime-in-the-u.s.-2010/violent-crime/aggravatedassaultmain). Homicide in Taiwan, however, includes incidents in which a person completed a homicide, attempted to commit homicide, or prepared to commit a homicide. This offense is defined more broadly than in the United States because the UCR does not include all such attempts weapon was used forcefully to intimidate or harm others. This closely matches the UCR definition, where “aggravated assault is an unlawful attack by one (for statutory details, see the Criminal Code of the Republic of China (2014): http://law.moj.gov.tw/Eng/LawClass/LawContent.aspx?PCODE=C0000001). The more encompassing definition of homicide in Taiwan may lead to a narrower gender gap compared with other countries due to inclusion of less serious forms of the offense and also to more
elastic rates and gender gap over time due to vicissitudes in law enforcement discretion related to defining homicide attempts. Any such effects are likely to be small. In contrast, the UCR uses a narrow definition of homicide but adopts a broader definition of aggravated assault that includes attempts. Variety in crime definitions is inherent across jurisdictions and societies. It is not our purpose here to compare violence rates across Taiwan and the United States, but to note definitional differences in Taiwanese homicide and aggravated assault statistics compared with what Western criminologists are accustomed and to aid interpretation of trends.

6. Like any official data source (e.g., UCR), Taiwanese crime data underestimate offending due to undetected, unreported, or unofficially handled offenses. Another concern may be the accuracy with which agencies collect and record offender and incident information (Mosher, Miethe, & Hart, 2011). However, Taiwan uses standardized offense definitions and collects nearly complete data from virtually all precincts in this highly centralized system (Hebenton & Jou, 2014). Serious crimes like homicide and robbery have very high clearance rates; it is not unusual for an agency to solve three-quarters or more of its cases in a given year with many solving nearly 100% of serious violent crimes (e.g., homicide, robbery, aggravated assault) (Chinese Statistical Association, 2013).

7. Wu (1995) examined declining Taiwanese gender differences in crime from 1979 to 1993; however, he did not evaluate offender-behavioral change versus net-widening enforcement hypotheses across various sources of data and he used a slightly different measure of the gender gap, which tends to be more sensitive to small changes (see Schwartz, Steffensmeier, Zong et al., 2009, for a comparison of ratio vs. percentage-based measures of gender gap change).

8. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) was passed in 1998, administrated a year later, and government statistical data released afterward (Chen, 2010; Chu & Sun, 2014).

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