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Editor's Note

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This double, special issue focuses findings from the “Gender and Aggression Project,” a U.S.-Canadian collaboration of extremely careful and talented social science researchers. Although the project focuses on juveniles, and only some of AJA’s members preside in juvenile cases, the research described here is valuable for AJA’s judges for several reasons, I believe. First, what is true for juveniles is often true for young adults. The psychosocial findings about risk and vulnerability presented in these articles will inform judges about people you see in your courtrooms, even if you are not a juvenile court judge or a general jurisdiction judge with a juvenile docket. Second, we often know less about females than we do about males. Throughout the articles, we learn about differences between juvenile boys and girls. Knowing that there are such differences—and understanding a bit about what some of those differences might be—will help judges in their work. Third, and now we are getting to some of the most important parts of this special issue, the authors present a *program of research*. Science advances in fits and starts. We learn a little each time we study something. But in a *program of research*, one begins to get a deeper, more nuanced sense of complex phenomena. In these articles, the authors communicate the array of insights they have gleaned. They have selected results that have relevance for law and policy. Fourth, the research presented here has been peer-reviewed. The importance of peer-review, I believe, is often underappreciated by the legal profession. Social scientists do not always “get it right,” no matter how hard we try. Independent peers review our work, to check against over-interpretations of the implications of data we have collected, or suggest (or even require) different analyses of the data to ensure that when a study asserts there is a statistically significant relationship between variables or a statistical difference between groups that the correct statistic was used. Often statistics have assumptions that should be met before such tools are deployed. It is easy to overlook this, and peer-review is a system that helps ensure that research is not presented as finding differences (or failing to find differences), when, in fact (if we could know the true state of affairs), it is not the case. Peer-reviewers are integral to the quality control of scientific findings, both in and of themselves and how they are communicated. Peer reviews are not a guarantee of accurate science. Again, any one study may be mistaken in its findings. Nevertheless, peer review helps to make sure that any one study is representing itself correctly, and a program of research serves as a protection against an incorrect inference about the true state of the world based on any one study. Of course, knowledge derived from science is more complex than what I am presenting here, but you get the point. This special issue, then, presents reports of a cross-jurisdictional (indeed, a multinational) program of high-quality research undertaken by careful researchers from the U.S. and Canada. I know reading research is dry, but it is a pleasure to read through these studies and learn about gender and aggression. I hope you agree. —Alan Tomkins

