Between the first edition of *Criminological Theory*, a collaboration initiated two decades ago, and the current edition, theorizing about crime has undergone major changes, none more dramatic and significant than what we review in this chapter. Our 1989 handling of feminists’ perspectives was severely limited; only twice did we even mention “feminism.” Feminist perspectives were then just beginning to develop beyond the seminal work of Adler (1975), Simon (1975), and Smart (1976). In the second edition, which appeared in 1995, we undertook a major renovation with regard to women and crime that was reflective of contextual and theoretical developments. Indeed, feminist theories were included as the first half of a new chapter, “New Directions in Critical Theory”—a plan we continued in the third edition, albeit much expanded. Since then, a number of important milestones in feminist criminology have occurred, not the least of which is the fact that the American Society of Criminology’s Division on Women and Crime—with its global membership—celebrated its twentieth anniversary. This new chapter reflects these continued developments and explores the important contextual and theoretical advances that elucidate our current understanding of crime and criminology from gendered perspectives.
The tour across the development of theories about gender and crime is lengthy and reaches into the somewhat distant past. We begin by examining early pre-feminist theories. These works had the advantage of focusing on women as offenders—something most other scholars ignored—but they did so in a limited, if not sexist, way, locating the causes of crime in females’ sexuality, biology, or pathology. A significant transition in criminology occurred when, in the midst of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, theories emerged that linked crime to gender roles, arguing that as women were liberated and gained equality, the nature and amount of crime would equalize with their male counterparts. Similar to the discipline as a whole, theories of female crime then moved farther to the political left—in a “critical” direction. Most important, scholars explored how crimes by and against women were shaped by the gender inequality inherent in patriarchy. Other scholars suggested that men's criminality also was fundamentally a product of gender—that crime was a form of displaying masculinity or of “doing gender.” More recently, feminist scholars have explored different ways to insert gender into the criminological enterprise and thus have “gendered” the study of crime. Further, there has been an understanding that gender is only one structure of inequality in society. Accordingly, a full understanding of female criminality necessitates theoretical and empirical investigations that explore the intersection of race, class, and gender. This journey across feminist theory ends with a discussion of postmodernism and, more concretely, with a consideration of the role of feminist ideas in bringing gender into the policy domain.

Background

Before examining contemporary feminist perspectives in criminological theory, we first must recognize that feminism's roots rest in antiquity. Among other origins, feminism has been traced to the Roman Empire, where several women championed emancipatory issues. Cornelia, the “Romans' own ‘favorite woman,’” led a reform movement of the plebeians against the patricians (Boulding, 1992, p. 8). Even after social unrest that saw the death of her two sons, Cornelia remained a voice for equality and became an international figure visited by men of affairs seeking her advice. A monument erected to her by the Romans indicates the reverence in which she was held. According to Boulding, Seneca and his mother Helvia both taught the equality of the sexes to their offspring and were promoters of women's emancipation (Boulding, 1992). Although their actions did not constitute a sea change ending the subordination of women and others, neither did emancipatory issues disappear throughout the ages.

The beginning of the first wave of the feminist perspective in the United States conventionally is located during the mid-19th century when the first women's rights convention was held at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 497). From this meeting’s “Declarations of Sentiments and Resolutions,” it was resolved that “the history of mankind is the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her” (Miles, 1989, p. 221).

This resolution and the first wave of the feminist perspective were themselves part of another emancipatory movement, the abolition of slavery. In fact, Miles (1989) argued
that of “all the causes that fueled the fight for the rights of women, most important was the parallel struggle against the slavery of the southern states in America” (p. 242). This and the feminist struggle, however, reached beyond the United States to include some European countries. But it was from England during the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Congress that abolitionists “imparted their feminist vision to their American sisters” (p. 237). This was a major impetus for the 1848 Seneca Falls convention. Still, as important as the anti-slavery and women’s movements were as mid-19th-century emancipatory developments, they were not the only two social struggles.

It is well to remember that the early to mid-19th century witnessed what some have termed the apex of one of the most profound and dramatic transformations in history—the industrial revolution. Begun in the mid-18th century in England, by the mid-19th century the industrial revolution, coupled with the rise of capitalism, had largely changed traditional family and village economies into factory production. One result was the near destruction of what previously had been a valued and necessary “household” partnership between spouses, their offspring, and extended households. Writing from Paris in the mid-19th century, the utopians Marx and Engels (1848/1992) argued in their *Communist Manifesto* that the bourgeoisie had

> pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and . . . left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.” It . . . drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasms, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value and, in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single unconscionable freedom—free trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. . . . [It] has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation. (pp. 20–21)

It is against this broader background of human struggle and exploitation that we now examine the feminist perspectives on criminology.

**Prefeminist Pioneers and Themes**

Until recent years, the criminality of women had a long history of neglect. In both the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries, however, there was a small group of writings specifically concerned with women and crime. Throughout this early literature, there were different analytical approaches, yet there were many shared assumptions about the nature of women and the crimes they committed (Klein, 1973). These assumptions focused on crime as the result of *individual* physiological or psychological characteristics of women. It also was thought that these characteristics were *universal* to women and that they transcended any historical time frame. Central, too, was the assumption that there is an *inherent nature of women* (Klein, 1973).
The focus on crime as a result of individual characteristics rather than on conditions in the existing social structure generated theoretical and research attention directed toward determining the differences between criminal and noncriminal women. One result was the creation of two distinct classes of women: good women who are not criminal and bad women who are criminal (Klein, 1973). Built into this distinction was another important assumption: Crime resulted from individual choices. Therefore, women were conceptualized as freely choosing to act criminal or noncriminal, void of any influences from the social, economic, and political worlds.

**CESARE LOMBROSO**

Often called the “father of modern criminology” (see Chapter 2), Cesare Lombroso had a great interest in tracing an overall pattern of evolution in the human species. According to his arguments, evolution accounts for the uneven development of groups. For example, Whites were more advanced than non-Whites, men were more advanced than women, and adults were more advanced than children. In the early 20th century, Lombroso (1903/1920) published *The Female Offender*, in which he described female criminality as an inherent tendency of women who, in effect, had not developed properly into feminine women with moral refinements. He buttressed his argument with physiological evidence that he thought explained why female criminals were biological atavists. Included here were cranial and facial features, moles, height, dark hair, and skin color. Short, dark-haired women with moles and masculine cranial and facial features were good candidates for crime.

Lombroso went further than this, however, by arguing that women also were characterized by physiological immobility, psychological passivity, and amorality featuring a cold and calculating predisposition. Criminal women, then, were in fact more masculine than feminine; they could “think like a man,” whereas “good women” could not. Criminal women also were thought to be “stronger” than men in some ways. Lombroso observed that criminal women could adjust more easily than men to mental and physical pain. As an example, he argued that criminal women often adjusted so well to prison life that it hardly affected them at all. For Lombroso, criminal women were abnormal.

**W. I. THOMAS**

A modified emphasis on the physiological explanations of female crime offered by Lombroso appeared in the work of W. I. Thomas. Born in an isolated region of Virginia and a graduate of the University of Tennessee, Thomas wrote his doctoral dissertation in sociology, *On a Difference in the Metabolism of the Sexes*, at the University of Chicago (where he taught his first sociology course in 1886). He wrote two influential books on sexual behavior and society: *Sex and Society* (Thomas, 1907) and *The Unadjusted Girl* (Thomas, 1923). Separated by 16 years between publications, the shift in emphasis in these books moved the discussions of women's behavior to more sophisticated
theories that “embrace physiological, psychological, and social-structural factors” (Klein, 1973, p. 11).

In *Sex and Society*, Thomas (1907) began by offering the age-old dichotomy that men and women were fundamentally different. For Thomas, men were destructive of energy and what can flow from it, whereas women stored energy much like plants; women were more motionless and conservative than men. This difference, according to Thomas, had contributed to a relative decline in the structure of women, especially in “civilized” societies. Thomas was ambivalent, however, as to why the stature of women had declined. At one point, he attributed the decline to a lack of superior motor fitness on the part of women. At another point, he argued the decline could be explained by women's loss of sexual freedom. He claimed that women, under the development of monogamy, had to confine their sexual behavior to being wives and mothers and adjust to the fact that they were treated as property controlled by men.

Underlying these arguments of the inferior status of women was a focus primarily on physiological issues. Men, for example, had more sexual energy than did women. This allowed men to pursue women for sexual reasons and allowed women, in turn, to exchange sex for domesticity (Klein, 1973). In essence, monogamy and chastity became a form of accommodation to men's basic urges.

In *The Unadjusted Girl*, Thomas (1923) shifted his position on female criminality in two directions. First, he argued that female delinquency was normal under certain circumstances given certain "assumptions about the nature of women" (Klein, 1973, p. 14). Unfortunately, Thomas did not specify the nature of these assumptions.

Second and more important, however, was Thomas's shift in focus from punishment of criminals to rehabilitation and prevention. This point represented a radical departure from the Lombrosian biological position, which claimed that crime-prone individuals must be locked away or sterilized as a preventive strategy (Klein, 1973). One important implication that followed was Thomas's contention that there was no individual who could not be made to be socially useful (Thomas, 1923). For him, individuals could be socialized to prevent antisocial attitudes even if they had been poorly socialized in slum families or neighborhoods. The key to this strategy lay in how individuals were taught to define their situations. Thomas claimed, for example, that the way in which to prevent women dissatisfied with their conventional sexual roles from committing crime was to socialize them to change their attitudes. In other words, they needed to adjust to their situations by first redefining them as acceptable. This, he explained, was one of the important reasons why middle-class women committed so few crimes; they had been socialized to accept their positions and treasure their chastity as investments (Klein, 1973). Lower-class women, on the other hand, had not been socialized to suppress their need for security and instead committed crimes rather inadvertently out of a desire for excitement and new experiences (Klein, 1973). Sexual behavior in delinquent girls, Thomas maintained, was used as a means for realizing other wishes.

Despite Thomas's shift in focusing attention away from biological determinism and toward rehabilitation, he nevertheless relied on the ever-present dichotomy of the good and bad woman to explain female crime. Bad women exploited men for fulfillment of their desires; good women used sex as a protective measure against the future and
uncertainty. Not unlike other men who had attempted to explain female crime, Thomas also underemphasized the importance of economic factors in favor of psychological characteristics.

**SIGMUND FREUD**

A similar emphasis is found in the work of Sigmund Freud. For him, the position of women was based on explicit biological assumptions about their nature. In essence, for Freud, “anatomy is destiny,” and because women’s anatomy is inferior to men’s anatomy, it was appropriate that women were destined to occupy an inferior social status including being mothers and wives (Klein, 1973, p. 16). The specific anatomical characteristics that Freud considered were men’s and women’s sex organs. According to Freud, the inferiority of women’s sex organs was recognized universally. Beginning during childhood, for example, male and female children were aware of this distinction, and girls grew up assuming that they had lost their penises as a form of punishment. One central consequence, according to Freud, was that girls developed penis envy and became revengeful, whereas boys came to dread their envy and vengeance.

An additional difference between men and women based on women’s anatomical inferiority, according to Freud, was the fact that women also developed an inferiority complex and tried to compensate for it by being exhibitionistic, narcissistic, and well dressed (Klein, 1973). According to Freud, this concern with personal matters helped to explain why women had little sense of justice, scant broad social concerns, and few significant contributions to building civilization. Because they could not sublimate their individual needs, they were concerned with marginal matters. On the other hand, men, as builders of civilization, recognized that individual urges, especially the sex drive, must be repressed to get on with worldly affairs. Otherwise, little of lasting value would be accomplished or produced. Therefore, men were rational, and women were irrational.

In this framework, “the deviant woman is one who is attempting to be a man” (Klein, 1973, p. 17, emphasis in original). Female aggression and rebellion, for example, were expressions of longing for a penis, and if not “treated,” women would only end up “neurotic.” Freudian-based treatment for women, therefore, was intended to have them adjust to appropriate sex roles. Again, as we have seen, the emphasis was placed on changing women to fit into society as defined by men rather than on changing society. To be normal, women had to adjust to and accommodate the glorified duties of wives and mothers at the expense of gender equality. As Klein (1973) observed, one clear implication of Freud’s logic is a class bias: “Only upper and middle class women could possibly enjoy lives as sheltered darlings” (p. 18). The lives of poor and Third World women are not so fortunate.

Another important implication is that Freudianism has had a powerful influence on transforming a gender and sexual ideology of proper female behavior and sexuality into a scientific framework. As such, Freudianism has been used for decades to maintain female sexual repression, sexual passivity, and the “woman’s place” in the nuclear family. Although a very controversial and often discredited theorist, his work is now
experiencing a renewed popularity (Adler, 2006, pp. 43–49; Kalb, 2006, pp. 50–51). His early legacy influenced the writing of many scholars including Pollak.

**OTTO POLLAK**

For Otto Pollak, one of the most influential post-World War II scholars in the field of female crime, female involvement in crime, compared to male involvement, was largely “hidden” from public view (Klein, 1973, p. 21; Pollak, 1950). Pollak advanced this theory based on the idea that women were inherently deceitful because of physiological reasons. Pollak reasoned that because men, unlike women, must achieve erections to perform sex acts, they could not hide their emotions or deny their failure to perform sexually. Women’s physiological nature, on the other hand, permitted them to hide their emotional involvement in sex to a degree. Therefore, Pollak suggested that women were innately deceitful. When combined with the domestic opportunities they had as maids, nurses, teachers, and homemakers, this deceitful nature permitted them to commit undetectable crimes (Klein, 1973).

Women also were vengeful, according to Pollak, especially during their menstrual periods. During this time, women once again recognized that their “anatomy is destiny” and that any desire to be men was doomed. False accusations, for example, were typical female crimes because they were an outgrowth of their nature and treachery. Shoplifting also was a special type of female crime reflecting the mental disease of kleptomania.

A final factor that Pollak advanced for explaining female hidden crime was chivalry in the criminal justice system. His argument was that although there was no major discrepancy between crime rates for men and those for women, women were treated differentially by the law, thereby keeping the rates of their crimes hidden (Klein, 1973; Pollak, 1950). He failed to consider that female criminals often were poor or were women who had stepped outside of chauvinistic, classist, and racist definitions of women’s proper roles.

Unfortunately, Pollak, like many other early theorists, failed to see that, in some instances, female crime could be explained by economic necessity. Instead, psychologically based and physiologically based sexual motives or mental illness often were invoked to explain female economic crimes. Only during the past few decades has this logic been challenged.

**New Questions Emerge**

In 1961, criminologist Walter C. Reckless questioned whether any theory of delinquency would be accepted if a criminologist paused to consider whether it applied to women (Reckless, 1961). It was nearly a decade later, however, before Bernard (1969) and Heidensohn (1968) drew attention to the “omission of women from general theories of crime” and “signaled an awakening of criminology from its androcentric
slumber” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 507). Indeed, in hindsight, the discovery of women as a conceptual term that could be incorporated into criminological theory has been called “quite literally, pioneering” (Young, 1992b, p. 289).

Two issues were critical at this stage of the development of feminist perspectives in criminology. The first issue was the uncertainty identified by Reckless of whether general theories of crime generated by men to explain crime by men and boys could be applied or generalized to women and girls. The second issue involved social structure and categories of risk. The question here was whether class, race, and age structures found to be the core of criminological theory for males also held for gender. This issue addressed the gender-based ratio question of why women commit less crime than men (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988).

But early feminist writing in criminology did not always focus on these problems. Instead, it centered on what Gelsthorpe (1988) called criminologists’ “amnesia” of women (p. 98). What followed was a number of critiques on the intellectual and institutional sexism found in explanations of female crime and criminal justice systems (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Some feminist writings focused on how women were represented or misrepresented in conventional criminological literature. This work, essentially a critique of “accumulated wisdom” about female offenders (in Britain, cf. Campbell, 1981; Smart, 1976), was of immense importance for demonstrating that theories of criminality developed by and “validated on men had limited relevance for explaining women’s crime” (Gelsthorpe, 1988, p. 98). Examples of such work abound and are easily found in leading criminology texts.

For many generations of American criminologists, no better example exists than the rabbit hole through which so many of them “fell” into the study of crime and justice, Sutherland and Cressey’s (1970) Criminology. Of the many introductory textbooks on criminology published in the United States so far, none has been “born again” in as many editions as has this book (Lilly & Jeffrey, 1979). Even its 11th edition, published in 1992, contained no discussion of a feminist perspective per se on crime. Although recognizing that recent research indicates a narrowing of the sex ratio between men and women for some reported crimes, this relationship was explained partially as a result of modifications in law enforcement practices that witnessed changes in the “somewhat chivalrous treatment they [women] traditionally received” (Sutherland, Cressey, & Luckenbill, 1992, p. 162).

This type of explanation of female crime, although perhaps having some empirical basis, pointed to a wider and more serious shortcoming: Sutherland and other early criminologists had little or no understanding of the social worlds of women and girls. It is not surprising, therefore, that historical explanations of female crime and deviance often focused more on biological forces than on social or economic ones (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Heidensohn, 1985; Morris, 1987). Nor is it surprising that examinations of juvenile and criminal justice system responses to girls’ misbehavior found that they were more concerned with girls’ proper sexual behavior than with the sexual behavior of boys (Chesney-Lind, 1973). In fact, there is very little juvenile justice system concern about boys’ sexual behavior. This suggests a sexist ideology reflecting “a set of ideas about the place of women in the social order that emerged in the...nineteenth century...It...placed men in the public sphere...and women
in the private sphere” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 509). Here men were found in the paid workforce, politics, and law, whereas women were located as the moral guardians of the household and family life.

The first wave of feminism ended in the United States in 1920 with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving nationwide suffrage to women. Second-wave feminism denounced the domestic or private “sphere as oppressive to women and sought to achieve equality with men in the public sphere” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 509). This ideological shift contributed to the development of a number of feminist critiques of criminology and to additional questions about equality being raised by feminists.

From Women’s Emancipation to Patriarchy

WOMEN’S EMANCIPATION AND CRIME

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the beginning of renewed emphasis on women’s issues, a development that came to be known as the women’s movement. Born in part out of questions about social, political, and economic equality with men, it was to have a profound impact on the nation’s social agenda, especially on how women and crime were examined (see Freidan, 1963). Prior to this development, criminologists often reported that women simply committed fewer and different crimes than men. Subsequent to an increased participation of women in the workforce, new explanations of female crime were developed.

During the mid-1970s, two controversial books—Adler’s (1975) *Sisters in Crime* and Simon’s (1975) *Women and Crime*—proposed ideas about women’s criminality based on analyses of female arrest trends of the 1960s and early 1970s. The two books reached somewhat different conclusions, but both were largely “an outgrowth of the unexamined assumption that the emancipation of women resided solely in achieving legal and social equality with men in the public sphere” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 510). Adler (1975) argued that lifting restrictions on women’s opportunities in the marketplace gave them the chance to be as greedy, violent, and crime prone as men. Simon (1975) read the evidence and concluded that women’s increasing share of arrests for property crime (she found no increases for violent crime) might be explained by their increased opportunities in the workplace to commit crime. Simon also wondered whether the emancipation of women might encourage law enforcement and courts to be more interested in treating men and women the same.

Both books attracted critical attention, and several scholars called into question many of the issues raised by both Adler and Simon. Steffensmeier (1978, 1980), for example, found that research contradicted the view that women were committing more masculine violent crimes. He reported that arrest rates for women were in fact increasing but that the gap between male and female crime rates was not closing. Rather, because female arrest rates historically had been so much lower than those of males, any small increase in the *absolute* number of female arrests showed up as a *relatively*
large percentage increase. But Steffensmeier (1980) did find that there were rate increases for women in the larceny-theft category, a type of crime in which women always have been found in great numbers.

Steffensmeier (1981) also disputed the claim that changes in the occupational structure generated increases in women's white-collar crime. He argued that Simon was wrong to classify larceny, fraud, forgery, and embezzlement by women as traditional white-collar or occupational crime. Steffensmeier argued that women were not committing stock fraud or embezzling large sums of money. Instead, they were being arrested for shoplifting and writing bad checks. For Steffensmeier, these crimes did not fit the white-collar criminal image presented by Simon. Overall, Steffensmeier and Cobb (1981) concluded that any increase in female arrest rates matched the daily activities of women, such as shopping and paying family bills, and not those associated with occupational positions.

This raised an important question: If increased occupational opportunities do not explain increased female crime, then what does? Two suggestions were offered by Steffensmeier. First, there were greater opportunity than in the past for women to commit petty theft and fraud because of a self-service marketplace. With this type of market comes a greater availability of credit for women, which in turn provides new opportunities for old crimes—shoplifting, passing bad checks, and credit card fraud. These new opportunities also are associated with increased security and detection procedures that improve the arrest rates for female offenders. Second, Steffensmeier and Cobb (1981) provided data indicating that law enforcement and court attitudes toward female offenders are changing and that now there is a greater willingness to arrest and prosecute women.

But Steffensmeier and his colleagues were not without their critics. Giordano, Kerbel, and Dudley (1981) argued that women's roles might be changing more gradually than can be measured in the relatively short time periods that Steffensmeier examined. Giordano et al. analyzed police records from 1890 to 1976 and found that female crime patterns differed greatly from those at the turn of the 20th century. During the early years of the 20th century, high percentages of female arrests were for prostitution, in marked contrast to the reasons for women being arrested during the late 20th century.

Herein was a serious problem, as critics noted: the failure to examine whether the trends that early research on female crime associated with the women's movement actually were occurring (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Were low-income women actually seeking equality with their male counterparts in the public sphere, as Adler argued? Were female arrests for property crime the result of opportunities, as Simon claimed? Or was their reading of the arrest data hampered by a liberal feminist perspective on gender that "ignores class and race differences among women and defines gender either as the possession of masculine or feminine attitudes or as role differences between men and women" (p. 511)? Both Adler (1975) and Simon (1975) ignored the impact of power relations in a patriarchy where the social structure allows men to exercise control over women's labor and sexuality. By focusing on the public sphere's aspects of equality and the opportunities of women compared to those of men, these scholars failed to consider one of the more important features of the dominant social structure—patriarchy.
PATRIARCHY AND CRIME

The “emancipation thesis” had great value in focusing attention on female crime, but it carried insights on female criminality only so far. Following Adler’s and Simon’s pioneering work, the next generation of feminist criminologists went from focusing on emancipation to patriarchy. As Akers noted in 1994, the major theme in feminist theories then was “the pervasiveness of male dominance in patriarchal society and its impact on crimes committed both by and against women” (p. 175). While this theoretical shift was a departure from the earlier focus on women’s liberation, it was not a total departure from criminological theories that focused on power, such as conflict and Marxist theories. The difference was found in what “type of power is placed at the center” (p. 175, emphasis in original). Marxist theories of crime, for example, focused on the power of the ruling class, and most conflict theories focused on the conflict between various powerful and powerless groups. For much of feminist theory at this time the focus was on men’s power over women.

This emphasis fit nicely with feminists’ contributions to our understanding of the nature of the crimes women committed as well as some of the crimes women experienced at the hands of men. The emphasis on power differences between men and women—it was argued—led women into “powerless” types of crime such as prostitution and small-scale fraud (Messerschmidt, 1986). These crimes bring little reward to women because they are marginalized by economic destitution. As such, some female crime is a manifestation of, and helps to reproduce, sexual stratification in society (see also Cloward & Piven, 1979).

Rape, other forms of sexual abuse including date and marital rape, and domestic violence were all explained by patriarchal dominance. Again, these crimes by men—and, therefore, the victimization of women—reflected the ability of men to use their power against women. Unfortunately, relatively little research has tested the notion that patriarchy explains female crime. A major problem here is that patriarchy is difficult to measure as an independent variable, so that its explanatory value can be determined in different settings. Until this occurs, progress in assessing patriarchy theory will be slow. Fortunately for the development of feminist perspectives on crime, attention was given not only to the patriarchal structure of society but to the idea that gender is a social construction rather than merely biological sex. In retrospect it is clear that this shift in emphasis was a major development for feminist perspectives.

Varieties of Feminist Thought

EARLY FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

There are now several strands of theorizing and research comprising feminist perspectives that can be classified as “early” and “contemporary” feminist perspectives on crime. Liberal feminism, not surprisingly, has its foundations in 18th-century and 19th-century ideas of liberty and equality (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1984). It emphasizes
gender socialization as the cause of crime. Male dominance and female subordination are reflections of how each gender is taught to behave socially and culturally. According to this perspective, official crime data show that, for example, men commit more aggressive offenses than do women. Each gender, it is argued, commits crime consistent with role expectations, an important point that was developed more fully later with work that explored the complexities of the intersection of gender, race, class and age (see the next section: Contemporary Feminist Perspectives).

Marxist feminists adhere to the idea that the class and gender division of labor combine to determine the social position of men and women. The gender division of labor, however, is viewed as the result of the class division of labor, which is dominated by men. Masculine dominance of women, therefore, is not just an expression of sexism. The criminal victimization of women and the crimes they commit result from the mode of production under capitalism. From this perspective, women's labor in the home and in the marketplace creates profit for capitalists.

Radical feminism, by comparison, sees crime as part of the biological fact that men are born to be aggressive and dominant. Thus, crime is an expression—but not the only one—of men's need to control. Other expressions of this need are sexual slavery, imperialism, rape, and forcing women into motherhood. Rape, according to Brownmiller (1975), is nothing more than an attempt by all men to keep all women in a state of fear (Lilly, 2003, 2004, 2007; Lilly & Marshall, 2000).

Not entirely unlike Marxist feminism, radical feminism argues that women are first subordinated by men into a sexual division of labor that originates in procreation and child care and is “extended into every area of life” (Jaggar, 1983, p. 249). It is argued that various institutions—including the state, employment, and the family—reflect and reinforce this pattern of male dominance. Women's cultures and self-concepts also reflect male dominance and contribute to women's servile status.

Socialist feminism is unique because it attempts to merge Marxist and radical feminism by examining the various connections between patriarchy and capitalism that lead men to crime and women to subordination. In a major statement from this perspective, Messerschmidt (1986) contended that crime results from capitalist exploitation of workers. But men and women have different positions of power in relations of production, with men being more powerful. This gives men more opportunity to commit crime and, at the same time, keeps women relatively subordinate. Thus, women are given less opportunity to benefit from either legitimate or non-crime opportunities.

Unlike some of the other feminist perspectives on crime, social feminism argues that human behavior is shaped more by social forces than by “pre-social givens” (Jaggar, 1983, p. 304). Rather, human behavior is socially constructed and alterable, a theme that is central to more recent and complex gendered explanations of crime.

CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

Each of the above perspectives has shortcomings that have contributed to the development of additional perspectives, or morphed into an alternative theoretical formation. While not completely separated or divorced from the “traditional” or early
feminist perspectives, these efforts have placed gender—especially women—more centrally into their inquiries. They seek to understand crime and gender and how both intersect with race, class, and age. In fact, according to Miller and Mullins (2006), theories of gender are today the major starting point in criminological analysis of women and crime. The same scholars are of the opinion that this emphasis represents the best and most promising directions for the future of feminist criminology as “well as broader criminological thoughts” (Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 218). Central to this promise is the prospect of theories that help to explain the “gender gap” and thus become more generalizable across gender.

Developments in this direction benefited from the insightful work of Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) on what they consider the distinctive features of feminist theory. They include:

1. Gender is not a natural fact but a complex social, historical, and cultural product; it is related to, but not simply derived from, biological sex differences and reproductive capacities.

2. Gender and gender relations order social life and social institutions in fundamental ways.

3. Gender relations and constructs of masculinity and femininity are not symmetrical but are based on an organizing principle of men’s superiority and social and political-economic dominance over women.

4. Systems of knowledge reflect men’s views of the natural and social worlds; the production of knowledge is gendered.

5. Women should be at the center of intellectual inquiry, not peripheral, invisible, or appendages of men.

### Masculinities and Crime: Doing Gender

Similar to other feminist scholars, including Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988), James Messerschmidt (1993) believed that traditional criminological theories provide an incomplete understanding of crime because they omit gender from their analysis. While sympathetic to patriarchal explanations, he also contended that they, too, are incomplete. Although gender is not ignored in the patriarchal perspective, in a sense, he argued, men are. There is a distinct tendency to place men in a single category where “women are good, men are bad, plain and simple. And it is this essential badness that leads to patriarchy and violence against women” (p. 43). But this tendency to see men in a unidimensional and stereotypical way ignores both how masculinity actually is linked to crime and, equally important, how various types of masculinity are related to different types of offending.

Messerschmidt (1993) began his analysis with the observation that males are socialized into a “hegemonic masculinity.” This dominant cultural script means that
males define or achieve their masculinity through “work in the paid-labor market, the subordination of women, hetero-sexism, and . . . driven and uncontrollable sexuality” (p. 82). It further involves “practices toward authority, control, competitive individualism, independence, aggressiveness, and capacity for violence” (p. 82). In their lives and in any situation, men must constantly “accomplish” or demonstrate their masculinity in ways that are consistent with this cultural script. They may achieve this goal in conventional ways such as through success in sports, school, and employment. But if this goal is blocked—if legitimate avenues to accomplishing masculinity are not available—then males must find other ways of showing their masculinity. This focus on goal blockage is similar to strain theory, and for both theories some adaptation to, or way around, this frustration must be made.

Messerschmidt indicated that crime is a central method—a critical resource—that males experiencing goal blockages use to “do gender” and announce their masculinity. In the face of emasculation, then, men can employ crime as a way of showing others that they “have guts,” are fearless, or are “real men.” Importantly, Messerschmidt argued that the extent to which masculinity is challenged and the responses to these challenges differ by race and class. Thus, different “masculinities”—tied to the structural locations—emerge and have varying impacts on the content of criminal behavior.

With regard to delinquency, for example, White middle-class boys are able to achieve masculinity through success in sports and in school, all the while knowing that professional work lies in their future. As a result, they accommodate to the emasculating experiences of school life. Once outside the classroom, however, they show their masculinity through nonviolent crimes (e.g., vandalism) or binge drinking. White working-class boys are less likely to achieve success in school, defining it instead as “sissy stuff.” Accordingly, they manifest oppositional conduct in school such as pranks and other mischief. Outside the classroom they “do gender” through theft, fighting, or perhaps hate crimes. Finally, racial minority lower-class and working-class boys are likely to find school boring, unrelated to their future lives, and humiliating. In response, they evidence oppositional behavior that may involve physical violence. Outside the classroom, they take to the street, where they demonstrate masculinity through gang violence, robbery, and crimes in which victims are dominated and humiliated.

Messerschmidt (1993) also indicated that his perspective can account for a range of adult crimes, including the physical assault of women. In his view, wife beating is a “resource for affirming maleness” (p. 149). He predicted that such battering will be more prevalent among men who are in economically precarious positions, whether in the working class or unemployed. In his view, these men “lack traditional resources for constructing their masculinity and, as a result, are more likely than are middle-class men to forge a particular type of masculinity that centers on ultimate control of the domestic setting through the use of violence” (p. 149). That is, the inability to prove masculinity in the public realm makes the demonstration of masculinity in the home all the more salient. In this sense, battering “serves as a suitable resource for simultaneously accomplishing gender and affirming patriarchal masculinity” (p. 150).

Today we conclude that Messerschmidt’s 1993 work was important because it forced scholars to think more carefully about the features of maleness that may be implicated in crime causation and about how the intersection of race, class, and gender shape the
gender-specific problems men face and how men respond to them. Graham and Wells (2003) and Mullins et al. (2004), for instance, found that “most men's interpersonal disputes with other men were grounded in their need to build and maintain gendered reputations” (Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 238).

Additional advances in gendered perspectives are found in the empirical tests and theoretical work that has followed. Daly's (1998) work on gendered pathways to law-breaking, gendered crime, and gendered lives—while itself a tour de force in feminist criminological thinking—has contributed significantly to recent and more complex advancements in feminist criminology that have gone beyond Messerschmidt’s focus on masculinities (Miller & Mullins, 2006). We turn to these developments next.

**Gendering Criminology**

**GENDERED PATHWAYS TO LAWBREAKING**

From the early 1990s, feminist scholars have examined “what is now referred to as ‘gendered pathways,’” an approach to explaining crime that is similar to life-course analysis. Here, female experiences are mapped to explore what led them to crime as well as desistence from it. Research found that young girls who have run away from home in response to neglect and abuse often move on the street into homelessness, unemployment, drug use, and survival sex (Chesney-Lind & Paska, 2004; Gilfus, 1992; Miller & Mullins, 2006). An exclusive emphasis, however, on victimization as the key pathway to offending can minimize or overlook other indicators of gender inequality, including racial and economic marginality, school experiences, and drug and alcohol use.

**GENDERED CRIME**

Research on this aspect of gender and crime has renewed interest in “social situations that produce criminal events, as well as the individual decision-making and opportunity structures necessary for offending,” an avenue of criminological inquiry that dates back to Sutherland (Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 232). This emphasis is closely related to gendered pathways to lawbreaking, but it moves beyond individual motivation and the power of initial victimization and examines how “women navigate gender-stratified environments, and how they accommodate and adapt to gender inequality in their commission of crime” (Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 233). Gendered crime analysis attempts to discover the contingencies within and across gender in order to “more precisely specify dynamic relationships between gender and crime” (Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 236).

By pursuing how situations influence men and women's crimes, research on this topic permits promising comparisons. For example, some women’s crime is a response to opportunities for economic gain, recognition, and status enhancement as well as...
excitement and revenge. Prostitutes doing “sex work” for pimps may engage in “viccing”—a form of “rolling” a john—as a form of resistance to their victimization and vulnerability within sex markets cheapened by the drug economy (Maher, 1997). While at first glance “viccing” may look like an instrumental robbery, this “belies the reality that the motivations undergirding it are more complex and indeed, are intimately linked with women’s collective sense of the devaluation of their bodies and work” (Maher & Curtis, 1992, p. 246).

Consider also that while women’s relationships with men may explain why they are marginalized in male dominated crimes such as organized burglaries, the end of such relationships also hampers or ends women’s entry to other male dominated burglary crews. Thus women’s criminal opportunities were found to be restricted by situational changes (Mullins & Wright, 2003, cited in Miller & Mullins, 2006).

**GENDERED LIVES**

The concept of gendered lives, according to Daly (1998), emphasizes the “significant differences in the ways that women experience society compared with men” (p. 98, emphasis added). Miller and Mullins (2006) consider this aspect of feminist criminology as perhaps the most challenging because it requires systematic attention “to gender well beyond the analysis of crime” (p. 239). Compared to the attention given to studying the pathways to offending and the gendered nature of offending, less work has addressed gendered lives. Nonetheless, some important work has been published on this aspect of gendered crime. According to Miller and Mullins (2006), the works of Bottcher (2001) and Maher (1997) are important examples of this line of inquiry.

Bottcher’s (2001) work focuses not on gender as individual action, but “instead on the gendering of social practices” (quoted in Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 240). She identified three broad types of social practices: making friends and having fun, relating sexually and becoming parents, and surviving hardships and finding purpose. For example, Bottcher found that gender-segregated friendship groups placed high-risk males, compared with high-risk females, at greater risk of delinquent involvement. “Likewise, the meaning and rules guiding sexual relationships and childcare responsibilities had similar consequences” (Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 240).

Miller and Mullins (2006, p. 240) consider Bottcher’s approach to gendered lives to be important and notable because it emphasizes practices rather than individuals while at the same time it challenges the male-female gender dichotomy often found in studies of gender and crime. Furthermore, Bottcher demonstrates that gendered patterns of behavior are not universally applicable to all males or all females. Some male social practices encourage delinquent activity for either sex, while some female social practices appear to discourage delinquent behavior for both sexes (Bottcher, 2001, p. 904, quoted in Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 240).

Another example of exemplary research on gendered lives is found in Lisa Maher’s (1997) *Sexed Work*. It is a “consistent examination of the intersections of race, class and gender in shaping women’s experiences and lives, and illustrates the strengths of feminist scholarship that moves beyond an exclusive emphasis on gender” (Miller &
Mullins, 2006, p. 240). By blending feminist analysis with cultural reproduction theory she found, for instance, that contrary to some scholars who have argued that the drug trade opened new opportunities for women, gender inequality is institutionalized on the street. The stereotypes of women as unreliable and weak “limits women’s participation in informal economic street networks” (Miller & Mullins, 2006, p. 241). More specifically, she found a rigid gender division of labor in the drug trade that was shaped along racial lines in which women were clearly disadvantaged compared to men. Excluded from the more lucrative aspects of the drug trade, Maher reported that women found sex work one of the few viable options for making money.

This finding and others challenge previous explanations and descriptions of women’s participation in drug markets. It, for instance, contradicts the image of women crack users as desperate, pathological, and powerless individuals who will do anything for their next hit. Instead, Maher found that women are involved in any number of income-generating activities within the drug economy that follow occupational norms that govern their behavior. This finding supports the idea that women lawbreakers are less like dependent and passive victims and more like active, creative decision makers who often face contradictory choices. To think otherwise would be to deny the fact that crime in general and drug markets in particular involve a complex understanding of the relationship between structure and agency (Maher, 1997, p. 210, cited in Miller & Mullins 2006, p. 241).

The Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender

As important as many early contributions were for initial feminist perspectives, they tended to share a common limitation: They implicitly treated women as a monolithic or homogenous unit of analysis. More recently, however, scholars have begun to understand that women do not simply possess “gender roles” and exist in the single structure of inequality of patriarchy. Instead, their structural location and collateral experiences are diverse and potentially complicated. As a result, in moving beyond an exclusive focus on gender, feminist scholars have argued for the importance of theories and investigations that explore how crime is shaped by the intersection of race, class, and gender. In this regard, several important contributions merit consideration.

Writing in 1991, Sally Simpson argued that for a decade criminological research had targeted gender as an important indicator of criminal participation and persistence. But as important and insightful as this research had been for understanding gender and crime, Simpson (1991) noted that too often it had focused on contrasts between the criminality of males and that of females. More specifically, she argued that the past “research on gender and crime supported an incorrect portrait of violent criminality as primarily a lower-class phenomenon...disproportionately enacted by young males” (p. 115). This picture was only partially accurate, according to Simpson, because it did not address the complex interactive effect of gender, race, and class.

After first acknowledging the difficulty of addressing these interactive effects by relying on official statistics, surveys, and self-reported instruments, Simpson...
illustrated that African American females indeed have higher rates of homicide and aggravated assault than do White females. Sometimes Simpson (1991) found that for certain types of personal crime victimization, African American female rates “for adults and juveniles are more similar to those for white males than those for white females” (p. 117). In addition, among juveniles, African American females were reported to be consistently more involved in assaultive crimes than were White females. Based on this and other research, Simpson concluded that gender alone does not account for variation in criminal violence.

Simpson also considered class and its effect on African American female criminality. By extrapolating on the well-established sociological truism that class often is related to violent crime, Simpson (1991) illustrated that the increasing marginalization of underclass African Americans was correlated with high levels of criminal violence (p. 118). When combined with changes in divorce laws, occupational segregation with low pay for women, and the rise of single-parent mothers living in poverty, this contributes further to understanding linkages between African American females and crime. Simpson offered additional clarity about class, race, and crime with her discussion of violence and the underclass, a term used to describe the bottom of the lower class. Whereas the lower class is disproportionately female and African American and, therefore, is relatively heterogeneous, the underclass is racially more homogeneous; it is primarily African American and young. “Its geographical terrain is center-city urban” (p. 119).

Whether caused by relative economic deprivation, absolute poverty, or some interaction of class with race and urbanism, violent crime rates are highest in underclass communities. These are urban communities that are disproportionately African American (Simpson, 1991, p. 119). Female-headed households in these communities are related to increases in juvenile and adult robbery offending for “both blacks and whites, but they have a greater effect on black homicide rates” (p. 119). Furthermore, the labor marginality of African American males has an impact on African American women and children. It can be argued, for example, that one consequence of African American male marginality is that African American females have extensive and shifting domestic networks composed of kin, non-kin, and pseudo-kin. Because the parents and guardians in these networks experience severe limitations on the social control they have over their children, African American females often are susceptible to criminal recruitment.

A similar line of reasoning, yet one that was not specifically focused on African American females, is found in Ogle, Maier-Katkin, and Bernard's (1995) theory on homicidal behavior among women. In their lead article in an issue of Criminology, these authors started with research findings indicating that the patterns of homicides by women are different from those by men. The differences between male and female homicides are quite striking. For example, homicide is overwhelmingly a male crime. According to Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics, in 1998 89.4% of the people arrested for homicide were males. But homicide is not exclusively a male crime. Women do commit homicide on occasion. As these data indicate, women were arrested for 10.6% of the homicides in 1998.

These differences suggest the need for a separate theoretical explanation of female homicidal behavior, one that recognizes and incorporates important structural, social, and cultural gender differences between males and females. In an effort to do this, the
theoretical explanation offered by Ogle et al. (1995) reformulated three existing theories of criminal behavior and included an emphasis on situational stresses that women experience differently from males. For example, women tend to view themselves in the context of traditional sex roles and to be socially conservative. Women also perceive themselves as under “extreme life pressures that appear in many forms, especially depression” (p. 173). With these and other gender differences considered, Ogle et al. constructed a social psychological theory of homicidal behavior among females.

In general terms, Ogle et al. (1995) argued that men who kill do so out of a need to control a situation. Women who kill, on the other hand, tend to do so because they have lost control over themselves. For example, about 80% of the homicides by women involve killing intimates, especially in “long-term abusive relationships . . . and in pre- or postpartum periods” (pp. 173–175). Homicides by females generally occur in homes and often are spontaneous rather than planned.

Ogle et al. (1995) offered an empirically testable theory for various types of homicides by women. It focuses on structural, social, and cultural conditions, which generate strain for all women, which in turn produces negative affect. Women tend to internalize negative affect as guilt and hurt, unlike men who externalize it as anger directed at targets. For women, this results in a situation analogous to an over-controlled personality and results in overall low rates of deviance and crime. On occasion, however, extreme violence including homicide occurs, especially in long-term abusive relationships and pre- or postpartum environments. This theory is an important contribution to the feminist perspectives on crime because it specifically focuses on gender experiences unique to women.

Richie (1996) pursued a similar line of research on crime among some African American women. By focusing on the intersection of race, gender, class, and domestic violence, she argued that these women were essentially compelled into crime by their social circumstances. Her hypothesis was that their patterns of offending reflected economic marginalization, culturally constructed gendered roles for African American women, and their experiences with interpersonal violence.

Postmodernist Feminism

Postmodernist feminism is one of the many feminist theoretical approaches to studying women and crime, although a relatively minor perspective compared to the larger body of literature on feminist perspectives on crime. As explained in the previous chapter, one of the most prominent features of postmodernist thought is an emphasis on deconstructing traditional explanations and categories of crime and offenders found in positivist science. Postmodernist feminism therefore seeks to deconstruct the “racial, class, and gender stratification that has resulted from modern Western civilization” (D’Unger, 2005, p. 563).

Similar to the emphasis placed on the media by cultural criminology, postmodernist feminism is also concerned with the constructed images of crime, including the images of women offenders. These images are more reflective of the ideas of the

Consequences of the Diversity of Feminist Perspectives

Although the debate over women’s emancipation and crime has not been very fruitful empirically, greater attention has been given to women as victims and survivors of sexual and physical violence (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Aided by the women’s movement, popular and important works (e.g., Brownmiller’s [1975] famous Against Our Will), and numerous media reports of women as victims or survivors (e.g., the 1993–1994 case of Lorena Bobbitt severing her husband’s penis after years of alleged physical and psychological brutalization, the 1994 double murder of O. J. Simpson’s former wife Nicole and her friend Ronald Goldman), this topic—especially rape and intimate violence—has become central to the feminist perspective in conventional criminology and to left realism. It also has become central in the public consciousness ("Living in Terror," 1994; "Wife Tells Jury," 1994).

According to some observers, there are several reasons why the victimization of women as a topic has had such relative success compared to explaining female crime by the emancipation movement. First, victimization of women and girls can be tied to a number of feminist perspectives including Marxist, social, and radical feminisms. This expansion of the explanation of female victimization has permitted men’s violence against women to be more easily linked to some of the more salient features of patriarchy, especially power. Victimization of women is one way in which patriarchal power can be defined and perpetuated. Second, this linkage between patriarchy and power moved “large numbers of grassroots feminists and some academic feminists to document the then-hidden forms of violence suffered almost exclusively by women” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 513). Third, the whole milieu of the women’s movement affected criminology, including nonfeminist criminologists, who had to “digest and deal with feminist scholarship” (p. 513). The increasingly documented record of men’s violence against women had itself to be integrated into criminology; it could not be ignored. Finally, while these developments were taking place, more women and feminists were moving into criminology and other academic disciplines. Although this aspect of the feminist perspective in criminology has not been well charted, the impact of women on criminology has been debated.

One indication of this impact is found in the presidency of the American Society of Criminology (ASC). Founded in 1941, ASC has had 51 different presidents, only 5 of whom have been women, and all of these woman presidents have held office since 1989. The most recent female president of this organization, Julie Horney, was elected in 2005. The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), by comparison, has had 43 presidents since its first in 1963, and 5 of these have been women. These developments, especially the increased female membership in previously male-dominated professional organizations, no doubt were of great importance in developing a sense of urgency and affinity toward female victims (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 513).
Writing during the late 1970s, Rock (1977) observed in a review of Smart's (1976) *Women, Crime, and Criminology* that he doubted that “analytic losses” had been inflicted on criminological theory by not considering women. Today it is doubtful that this conclusion would be accepted as much more than sexist rhetoric. More recently, in a brief review of the impact of feminist work on criminology, Young (1992a) argued that by revealing the partiality and inaccuracy of conventional criminology regarding female crime, feminists sent a jolt “through the entire criminological enterprise” (p. 292). Slowly, he claimed, course syllabi were altered to include women and crime, new courses were designed, and conferences began to include sessions on women and criminal justice. Texts on deviance and criminology also were revised to reflect feminists’ arguments including, in Britain, Downes and Rock’s (1988) classic *Understanding Deviance*. In the United States, Sykes’s (1978) *Criminology* contained only one feminist’s interpretation of female property crime. Its second edition, however, contained an entire section titled “Feminist Criminology” (Sykes & Cullen, 1992). These changes and modifications were interpreted by one female observer as so influential as to have “revivified a discipline that had come to seem bogged down in its own internal arguments” (Young, 1992a, p. 290). The question remains, nonetheless, whether there is a “feminist criminology” today. The record appears to be mixed.

Addressing this question during the late 1980s, Gelsthorpe (1988) concluded that the term feminist criminology as used then created confusion. There are two difficult core elements that would identify feminist criminology. Certainly, according to Gelsthorpe, a feminist criminology cannot exist, just as there cannot be a feminist sociology, history, philosophy, or any other single feminist discipline. There are multiple feminist perspectives in criminology. Some feminists argue that men and women should be dealt with equally by the criminal justice system; others claim that they should be treated differently. Some argue that men and women differ in their capacity to commit crime; others disagree. Still others claim that feminist criminology should develop alternative interpretations of social reality; others argue that feminist criminology should focus on explaining the gross differences between men’s and women’s crime rates.

Although not dismissing the importance of these different emphases, Renzetti (1993) asked whether feminism has had enough of an impact to transform criminology/criminal justice education so that gender is a central organizing theme. Organizing her evaluation around curriculum, pedagogy, and campus climate for students and faculty, Renzetti concluded that feminist criminology/criminal justice education seems to remain at the margins of the “male-stream” (p. 219). In support of her conclusion, she pointed out that although women currently constitute more than 52% of the general undergraduate population, 40.4% of bachelor’s degree recipients in criminology, and 68.4% of bachelor’s degree recipients in sociology, they still are “largely invisible in our courses and textbooks” (p. 226). She stated that, at best, women are marginalized in special courses as special topics or in separate token chapters. They are not fully integrated into the criminology/criminal justice curriculum.

Campus culture also has contributed to the marginalization of gender issues in criminology/criminal justice. Drawing on the works of Goodstein (1992), Hall and Sandler (1985), and McDermott (1992), Renzetti (1993) reported that classroom interaction
patterns among faculty and students, including sexist humor and language, “breeds other, less subtle forms of discrimination including sexual harassment” (p. 228). According to Stanko (1992), this contributes to women’s marginalization because these experiences are reminders that they are “only women.”

Feminist critiques of traditional pedagogy and research methodologies denounce the rigid separation of the “knower” from the “known.” Greater emphasis is placed on qualitative methodologies employing interactive or participatory research strategies. As Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) stated, “They are more interested in providing texture, social context, and case histories . . . , presenting accurate portraits of how . . . women become involved in crime” (p. 518). Feminist critiques object to insensitive quantification (Renzetti, 1993). More central to developing feminist criminologies is the emphasis on gender. This is not to de-emphasize the feminist perspectives’ concern with stereotypical images of women and methodologies sympathetic to these concerns (Gelsthorpe, 1988), but gender is not only about women. As Renzetti (1993) explained, “The goal of feminism is not to push men out so as to bring women in, but rather to gender the study of crime” (p. 232). Theories that do not consider it not only are incomplete but also are misleading because gender carries great social, economic, and political significance (Gelsthorpe, 1988).

Additional consequences of the feminist perspectives on crime are found in a number of public social policies. Mandatory arrest for domestic violence, for example, is now widespread throughout the United States, although its long-term impact on domestic violence has been questioned (Sherman, 1992). Changes in rape laws represent another example of the impact of the feminist perspectives on social policies. Traditionally, explanations of rape have focused on the sexual component of the offense with emphasis given to offenders’ excessive sexual tensions or maladjustment and the manner in which the victims “asked for it.” Since the early 1970s, the focus has changed from defining and prosecuting rape as a sexual act to treating it as an act of violence. Key to this shift in emphasis is recognizing that rape is an act of subjugation/domination reflecting cultural definitions of male roles. This interpretation emerged with the development of the women’s movement and the feminist perspectives on crime and has been elaborated by several observers. Griffin (1971), for example, claimed that rape is ingrained deeply in patriarchal societies and is used as a form of mass terrorism to deny women self-determination.

Others have given attention to what is now called “date rape,” a topic unthinkable just a generation ago. The heart of the issue here is the question: When is sex considered sex, and when is sex considered rape? It developed in large measure as college women began to report being raped not by strangers but rather by men they knew well or casually (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2001). As colleges and universities learned of this phenomenon, new reporting policies were created, and now the federal government and several states have laws requiring educational institutions to report crime statistics. Other responses include new college and university educational programs on acquaintance rape and consensual sexual relations (Celis, 1991; Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2005).

Rape shield laws are another example of the impact of the feminist perspectives on criminal justice policy. These laws grew out of the need to protect a rape victim from
being raped twice: once by the accused and then again symbolically by the accused’s defense attorney probing the victim’s past sexual behavior. Every state has adopted some type of rape shield law, but these laws vary considerably, especially regarding whether the victim previously had consensual sexual relationships with the defendant.

No one knows exactly how many women are raped annually, but it is clear that redefining rape as an act of violence, recognizing the existence of date and acquaintance rape, and developing rape shield laws represent dramatic changes in how rape is defined and prosecuted. But these changes are not the only evidence of the influence of the feminist perspectives on rape. More and more today, rape victims are finding justice through civil courts. Experts on rape say that the number of civil suits has grown from just a few 20 years ago “to a steady stream, as women have become less ashamed by rape and more aware of the legal options for fighting back” (“Many Rape Victims,” 1991, p. A1).

Some Implications of Feminist Criminology for Corrections

Women comprise only 7% of the U.S. correctional population, but their number is rising even more rapidly than is true for men. In fact, by 2006 there were almost 200,000 women in prisons and jails in the United States, the number having doubled from that of only five years before (Amnesty International, 2006). The so-called steel ceiling (often attributed to the so-called chivalry hypothesis) that used to divert women to correctional alternatives such as probation or other forms of community-based treatment, has been cracking for some time (Kruttschnit & Green, 1984), in part because women are committing a greater number of crimes of the sort that bring men to jail and prison, in part because of mandatory sentencing, in part because of the “war on drugs” that is sometimes called a “war on women,” and perhaps in part because of a “vengeful equity” that has led the criminal justice system to respond to women’s demand for equality with an equity that makes them pay for such demands (Chesney-Lind, 1998). At the same time, it is widely recognized that correctional systems were designed for men and that their deficiencies are magnified when dealing with women (Bell, 1998).

The human rights movement in general and feminist criminology in particular has called attention to several major problems facing correctional systems for women. Clearly, women bring different needs to prison. For example, approximately 80% of women inmates have dependent children, many of whom will have to be placed in foster care or even institutionalized themselves because there is no one else available to care for them. Equalitarian thought may insist that much the same is true for men, but it is still true that women are more family oriented than men, that they do most of the child caring, and that women inmates express more anxiety over their children than do male inmates (Allen, Latessa, Ponder, & Simonson, 2007).

Although the exact figure is unknown (with estimates of about 5%), a significant number of women enter prison pregnant. They need special diets, lighter work assignments, a less stressful environment, and other medical and environmental
adjustments. Some female prisons have started programs, but these are rare. For example, Washington State has a nursery program, and California has initiated a Community Prisoner Mother Program in which inmate mothers live with their young children in seven small community-based facilities. Such programs are the exception, however, and their lack shows just how much the prison is still considered a “man’s world.” Meanwhile, recent reports still show that “prisons often shackle pregnant inmates in labor,” a practice that is considered dangerous to both the woman and her child (Liptak, 2006).

Pregnancy, however, is only one example of the difference in the nature of medical problems encountered with women inmates. The National Institute of Corrections has found that gynecological services for women in prison are seriously inadequate (Amnesty International, 2006). A recent California study, for example, found that many women inmates had not had a Pap smear or mammogram for several years (Katayama, 2005), despite the fact that 5 years earlier, 32% of them reported gynecological and reproductive health problems (Stoller, 2000). This is partly because correctional medical services are designed for men and partly because medical facilities in most institutions for women are inadequate because of the small size of the prison population and the expense of special programming. The medical problems of women inmates constitute a serious problem because the cost of health care in state prisons for women is 60% more expensive than it is for men and still unsatisfactory (Katayama, 2005).

Even in women’s prisons, the staff is still predominately male. Obviously, feminists concerned with patriarchy have special reason to be interested in the fact that women placed in prisons are under even more male control than those outside. Because they take away one’s autonomy, prisons tend to foster a certain “dependency” in any case, and such institutionalization is unlikely to make women stronger. Furthermore, there is the continuing problem of sexual exploitation, sometimes in terms of return for favorable treatment, sometimes because of the psychological dominance inherent in the situation, and sometimes because of blatant rape (Human Rights Watch, 1998). Such reports are not uncommon, and to feminist criminologists and others they suggest the need for more women correctional officers (assuming that we are going to continue on our incarceration binge) and open policies that make it more difficult to retaliate against inmates who report sexual exploitation (Human Rights Watch, 1998).

Feminist criminologists and others have often commented on the abuse suffered by girls and women in a patriarchal society, and this is reflected in the problems women inmates bring to prison. A recent California study showed that some 57% of female inmates were physically or sexually abused prior to entering prison, compared with 16% of the men (Vesely, 2004). These women and others have special self-esteem issues along with a higher incidence of suicide attempts and drug abuse problems than do men (Allen et al., 2007). Programs such as boot camps may be especially hard on women offenders who have come from abusive relationships (MacKenzie et al., 1994).

On the other hand, the fact that prisons are still designed for men is reflected not only in the failure to face the different needs of women and their actual exploitation but also in the stereotypical programming often provided. In spite of the feminist movement, vocational programs still tend toward old favorites such as preparation for careers as a secretary, nursing assistant, or beautician. Because so many facilities for
women are smaller, the rehabilitation programs, including vocational training opportunities, tend to be more restricted than in institutions for men. All this is compounded by the fact that because many states have only one major facility for females, it will often contain high, close, medium, and minimum classifications within it, meaning that women incarcerated because of minor drug dealing to support an addiction are mixed with violent offenders and that all the inmates must suffer from restrictions considered necessary to deal with the most problematic. Despite recognition of the need for “gender-responsive strategies” (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003) that consider the special needs and problems of women inmates, all of these issues persist.

Conclusion

Feminist scholars have succeeded in “gendering criminology” in important ways. Where once it was permissible simply to ignore women offenders and victims or to attribute female criminality to sexuality and pathology, now it is clear that no theory will be complete—will be truly “general”—if it does not take into account the role of gender in both women’s and men’s crime. In the time ahead, an important challenge will be to determine how criminality is affected not only by gender differences but also by gender similarities. Although exceptions exist, feminist approaches have tended to unmask the unique experiences that shape women’s criminal involvement. This perspective is understandable—and invaluable—given that these factors would have otherwise escaped consideration. Even so, there is a growing body of evidence that the risk factors for crime are similar for males and females, though they may express themselves in social relationships in different ways (see, e.g., Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001). Reconciling how gender differences and similarities converge to affect the development and specific manifestations of crime thus promises to be a theoretical and empirical puzzle worthy of careful consideration.