
CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

Readings and Retrospectives

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introduction to drugs by husbands or boyfriends. Women tend to be less involved in heavy drinking or hard drug use—those drugs most intimately tied to drug subcultures and the underworld more generally. Female addicts are less likely to have other criminal involvements prior to addiction, so the amplification of income-oriented crime is greater for female drug users. Female addict crimes are mainly prostitution, reselling narcotics or assisting male drug dealers, and property crimes such as shoplifting, forgery, and burglary.

Advantages of Paradigm

A gendered approach helps to clarify the gendered nature of both female and male offending patterns. For women, “doing gender” preempts criminal involvement or directs it into scripted paths. For example, prostitution draws on and affirms femininity, while violence draws on and affirms masculinity.

At present it is unclear whether nontraditional roles for women will contribute to higher or lower rates of female offending. Traditional roles constrain most women from crime but may expose others to greater risks for criminal involvement. Wives playing traditional roles in patriarchal relationships appear to be at greatest risk both for victimization and for committing spousal homicide. Similarly, women emotionally dependent on criminal men are more easily persuaded to “do it all for love.” (Note, nevertheless, that men are also more easily persuaded by other men.) Cross-cultural differences complicate the issue further. For example, among gypsies, traditional gender roles prevail and male dominance is absolute. Yet, because gypsy women do practically all the work and earn most of the money, their culture dictates a large female-to-male involvement in thievery.

A gendered approach can also help explain both stability and variability in the gender effect. A growing body of historical research indicates that the gender differences in quality and quantity of crime described here closely parallel those that have prevailed since at least the thirteenth century. Even where variability does exist across time, the evidence suggests that changes in the female percentage of offending (i) are limited mainly to minor property crimes or mild forms of delinquency and (ii) are due to structural changes other than more equalitarian gender roles such as shifts in economic marginality of women, expanded availability of female-type crime opportunities, and greater formalization of social control. The considerable stability in the gender gap for offending can be explained in part by historical durability of the organization of gender. Certainly for recent decades, research suggests that the core elements of gender roles and relationships have changed little, if at all. Underlying physical/sexual differences (whether actual or perceived) may also play a part. Human groups, for all their cultural variation, follow basic human forms. . . .

Our knowledge about fundamental issues in the study of gender and crime has expanded greatly with the proliferation of studies over the past several decades, although significant gaps still exist. Given the relatively low frequency and less serious nature of female crime, expanding research on female offending may seem hard to justify. But research on the gendered nature of crime contributes to the understanding of male as well as female crime. Furthermore, the study of gender and crime is a productive arena for exploring the nature of gender stratification and the organization of gender more generally.

CONTEMPORARY RETROSPECTIVE ON FEMINIST THEORIES

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD: ASSESSING CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST CRIMINOLOGY¹

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Given the ubiquitous nature of the sex differential in crime and in deviance in general, any generalizing theory must point to factors which operate with very different effects upon men and women or, alternatively, that their like deviance is dealt with in very different manners by facets of the social system. Indeed whether a particular theory explains feminine delinquency as well as masculine and offers within its framework an explanation for the apparent difference in rats is often a useful touchstone of its validity. (Heidensohn, 1968, pp. 164–165)

From its inception until as recently as the early 1970s, modern criminology existed almost entirely free from the influence of feminist thought. As a result, theories developed to explain criminal behavior also were largely uninformed by feminism, until 1968 when Frances Heidensohn “launched the first missile” of feminist criticism at mainstream criminology (Simpson & Gibbs, 2006, p. 269). Pioneering feminist criminologists like Heidensohn, Dorie Klein (1973), Freda Adler (1975), Rita Simon (1975), and Carol Smart (1976) strongly criticized existing criminological theories, lamenting the near total absence of gender from explanations of offending behavior. Although many of these early criticisms were advanced by liberal feminists whose ideas about sex role socialization and criminality have been dismissed by radical and socialist feminist criminologists more recently (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Kruttschnitt, 1996; see also Miller, 1986), concerns about the absence of gender from criminological scholarship still resonate today.

The purpose of this essay is to assess the state of contemporary feminist criminological theory. I begin by providing a brief overview of the theoretical foundation of feminist criminology in order to answer the question, “What is feminist criminology?” In this section I outline three important feminist criticisms of traditional criminological theories as well as solutions offered by feminist scholarship. Next, I outline some of the criticisms that, in turn, have been directed at feminist criminology. I then provide examples of contemporary empirical investigations that aim to develop, refine, and test feminist criminological theories. Finally, I offer suggestions for theoretical advancement in contemporary feminist criminology and discuss the relevance of this advancement for criminal justice policy.

Theoretical Foundation: What Is Feminist Criminology?

It is inaccurate to think of “feminist criminology” as a single theory, like differential association or general strain theory, for example. Instead, feminist criminology is better understood as a collection of theories, perspectives, and methodologies that consider how gendered social relations influence the commission of crime, the processing of offenders in

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the criminal justice system, the behavior and application of criminal laws, and other social processes related to issues of crime and justice. Indeed, feminist theories have been offered to explain a wide variety of criminological phenomena, from offending behaviors like rape and intimate partner violence to processing decisions including arrest and sentencing. Moreover, feminist criminology—like feminism itself—consists of multiple perspectives, each having distinct assumptions about the source (or sources) of women's oppression (Barak, Flavin, & Leighton, 2001; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Price & Sokoloff, 2004). For example, liberal feminists attribute women's oppression primarily to gender role socialization, whereas radical feminists fault patriarchy and male-dominated social relations (Burgess-Proctor, 2006, for a review). Although the diverse perspectives found in feminist criminology share commonalities in that they "focus on women's interests, are overtly political, and strive to present a new vision of equality and social justice" (Flavin, 2001, p. 272; see also Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995), the multiplicity of perspectives nonetheless make feminist criminology somewhat challenging to succinctly define.

Instead, it may be more useful to consider that a primary goal of feminist criminology is to address and correct the historical exclusion of gender (and other sources of inequality such as race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality) from mainstream criminological scholarship. To that end, feminist criminology offers three important criticisms of traditional criminological theories. These criticisms, along with the theoretical solutions offered by feminist criminological scholarship, provide insight into the theoretical foundation of feminist criminology.

Feminist criticism #1: The generalizability issue

What is the problem? The first important feminist criticism of traditional criminological theories is that they are presumed to explain both men's and women's offending. Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) call this approach to theory building the "generalizability problem" (p. 508). It is well established that, almost without exception, most criminological theories were developed by male scholars to explain crimes committed by men and boys, and were tested using male-only samples (Belknap, 2001; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004a; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Flavin, 2001; Miller, 2004; Morash, 1999; Simpson, 1989). Thus, the question for feminists is whether and/or to what extent these theories can explain women's offending. In other words, the problem is that male-centered theories are generalized to the entire population of offenders and are uncritically presented by their proponents as being applicable to all types of offending behavior by both men and women (see, for example, Akers, 1997; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Absent from these theories, though, is consideration of whether the etiology of women's offending is better explained by alternative, gender-specific theories. Regarding the issue of generalizability, the question for feminist criminologists can be put simply: "Do theories of men's crime apply to women? Can the logic of such theories be modified to include women?" (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 514).

Notwithstanding the fundamental external validity problems inherent in making claims about groups that one has not directly sampled or studied, mainstream criminological theories have been criticized by feminist scholars for failing to consider how gender inequality shapes opportunities and motivations for committing crime. For example, Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) question what it means "to develop a gender-neutral theory of crime . . . when neither the social order nor the social structure of crime is gender-neutral" (p. 516). In other words, given that traditional criminological theories are posited to be

gender-neutral (and universal) yet have been developed without consideration of how gender structures human behavior, what are the implications of theories that ignore gender in the face of real-life gender inequality and discrimination? Clearly, such theories lack relevance in explaining the behavior of individuals—both male and female—whose opportunities and motivations for engaging in crime are structured by gender.

In a different vein, feminist criminologists also have criticized mainstream criminological scholarship for failing to capitalize on the contributions gender-based explanations can offer the field. For example, Morash (1999) notes that "gender-focused theories are particularly relevant to explaining crime . . . [because] they stimulate a reconceptualization of crime, and related new approaches to measuring it . . . An important result of revised concepts and increased understanding of the effect of gender on crime is implications for the choice of interventions to prevent and control crime" (p. 454). Thus, theories that fail to account for the influence of gender may not be able to adequately inform crime prevention and control strategies.

Specific criminological theories have been criticized by feminist scholars for ignoring gender differences in the etiology of offending. For example, Belknap (2001) observes that strain theory, as developed by Merton (1938), Cohen (1955), and Cloward and Ohlin (1960), considers strain only in the context of economic inequality, and that class-based explanations lose relevance for explaining female offending once it is considered that women are the most impoverished group in nearly every Western society, yet commit far fewer crimes than men. In other words, economic strains likely do not motivate female offenders to commit crime in the same way that they motivate male offenders, and therefore are not generalizable to women's experiences. Criticizing perhaps the most famous "general" theory of crime, Belknap (2001) points out that Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) self-control theory ignores gender dynamics within the family setting, where, according to Gottfredson and Hirschi, "proper" discipline is thought to ensure the development of self-control in children (see also Flavin, 2001). Finally, Morash (1999) faults Akers's (1997) theory of social learning and social structure for failing to recognize that "social structure not only produces differential learning, but also produces differences in power, opportunities, and resources" for men and women (p. 457). That is, though Akers's "general theory" (like Gottfredson and Hirschi's "general theory") purports to explain all types of deviant behavior, it fails to consider the influence of gender on men's and women's criminal offending.

What theoretical solutions does feminist criminology offer? According to Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988), the absence of women's experiences from mainstream criminological theories cannot be rectified by a simple "add women and stir" approach (see also Barak et al., 2001), but rather "a reconceptualization of analytic categories is necessary" (p. 504). Put differently, simply appending women's experiences onto the experiences of men does not constitute theoretical advancement. Rather, criminological theoretical advancement occurs through the reconceptualization of key concepts and ideas (Morash, 1999). Thus, criminologists must not engage in the uncritical application of existing theories to women's experiences, but instead should identify new theoretical concepts and propositions that are informed by feminist insights (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988).

An example of the type of reconceptualization advocated by feminist criminologists is "blurred boundaries" (Daly & Maher, 1998), a term that refers to the confluence of women's victimization and criminalization experiences. Recent feminist explanations of female

offending propose that women's previous experiences with victimization are inextricably linked with their later offending behaviors (e.g., Gaarder & Belknap, 2002; Miller, 2004). This proposition states that "criminalization is connected to women's subordinate position in society where victimization by violence coupled with economic marginality related to race, class, and gender all too often blur the boundaries between victims and offenders" (Gilfus, 1992, p. 86). A related example is "feminist pathways" research (Belknap, 2001). Feminist pathways studies reconceptualize ideas used in traditional life-course theories (for example, as advanced by Sampson & Laub, 1992) by using women's and girls' voices to identify life-course events that may particularly influence female offending (Belknap, 2001). For instance, Richie (1996) used feminist pathways analysis to develop her theory of gender entrapment, which she uses to explain criminal offending among black battered women. These theoretical advancements respond to the first feminist criticism of mainstream criminological theory (the issue of generalizability) by reconceptualizing existing mainstream theoretical perspectives to reflect feminist insights.

Feminist criticism #2: The gender gap issue

What is the problem? The second important feminist criticism of traditional criminological theories is that they fail to adequately explain the gender disparity in offending, or what Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) call the "gender-ratio problem" (p. 508). Perhaps the most robust of all criminological findings is that men are more likely to commit crimes than women, yet traditional criminological theories have been unable to adequately explain why this gender gap exists (Britton, 2000; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Liu & Kaplan, 1999; Miller, 2004). Extending the issue of generalizability, then, feminist criminologists assert that even if it can be shown that the same processes explain male and female offending, a void remains when it comes to explaining why men offend in greater numbers than women. The questions for feminist criminologists, then, are: "Why are women less likely than men to be involved in crime? Conversely, why are men more crime prone than women? What explains [these] gender differences?" (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 515). Feminist criminologists have observed that the exclusion of gender from mainstream theories of crime is particularly regrettable given that gender is such an important predictor of crime (Belknap, 2001; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). That is, attempts to identify processes that explain men's and women's offending still leave unanswered the question of why there exists a gender gap in offending.

Further, feminists also recognize that although women as a group are less likely to offend than men, black women have higher levels of involvement in offending than white women (e.g., Belknap, 2001; Daly, 1997). Thus, the gender-ratio problem becomes more complicated when considered within the context of race/ethnicity (and class), further underscoring the failure of mainstream criminological theories to explain race- and class-based variations in gendered patterns of offending. As a result, gender—both alone and in conjunction with race/ethnicity—remains undertheorized in mainstream criminology.

What theoretical solutions does feminist criminology offer? The absence of sufficient explanations for the gender gap in offending has prompted feminist criminologists to develop new theories that can account for variation in men's and women's offending rates. One such theory is power-control theory, as developed by John Hagan and his colleagues (Hagan, 1989; Hagan, Gillis, & Simpson, 1985; Hagan, Simpson, & Gillis, 1987).

Power-control theory combines insights from Marxist and feminist approaches to offer a structural explanation for the gender gap in offending. Specifically, power-control theory suggests that girls are less deviant than boys because they are subjected to greater parental (specifically, *maternal*) social control that emphasizes and reinforces their risk-avoidant behavior (Hagan et al., 1985, 1987). Specifically, Hagan and his colleagues argue that daughters in "patriarchal" families, in which the father is the authority figure and the mother is not employed outside the home, are subjected to greater parental control than daughters in "egalitarian" families, in which both parents share authority and work outside of the home, and consequently engage in less deviant behavior (Hagan et al., 1987). Though power-control theory is an example of feminist-oriented theoretical reconceptualization, it has also been criticized by feminists for suggesting that girls' criminality is rooted in their mothers' liberation and workforce participation (e.g., Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004a).

A second feminist theory that addresses the gender-gap issue is Messerschmidt's structured action theory (Messerschmidt, 1993, 1997; see also Miller, 2002). Structured action theory, simply put, states that crime is associated with power. One key proposition of this theory is that because women are excluded from gaining broad-based social power, and because crime and power are linked, men will be more likely than women to engage in criminal behavior (Messerschmidt, 1997). Moreover, men's tendencies to engage in criminality can be explained in terms of their efforts to "do gender." Thus, a second proposition of structured action theory is that crime is one means for men to express their masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1997). According to a structured action approach, then, "Women and men 'do gender' or behave in gendered ways, in response to normative beliefs about femininity and masculinity. . . . [T]his approach has been incorporated into feminist accounts of crime as a means of explaining differences in men's and women's offending . . . and can help account for men's greater involvement in particular types of crimes (e.g., violence)" (Miller, 2004, p. 54; see also Miller, 2002). These theoretical advancements respond to the second feminist criticism of mainstream criminological theory (the issue of the gender gap in offending) by offering explanations for the criticism.

Feminist criticism #3: The appropriate methodology issue

What is the problem? The third important feminist criticism of mainstream criminological theories is that they have been developed and tested using quantitative methodologies, which arguably are not well suited to generating detailed descriptions about the ways in which gender structures criminal behavior. Although quantitative analyses formed the foundation of early efforts at answering the gender-ratio problem (Kruttschnitt, 1996) and may have a measure of success in attempting to answer the "generalizability problem" (e.g., see Liu & Kaplan, 1999), they are not designed to provide detailed, descriptive information about the gender-crime relationship. However, these quantitative methodologies are given priority in mainstream criminology, thereby stunting opportunities for theory building using qualitative methods (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Unfortunately, "quantitative advances have outrun theoretical developments pertaining to the gender-crime relationship. Accordingly, it is time to start focusing on the question of what observed gender differences *mean* in terms of the life course experiences that ultimately result in patterned differences in offending" (Kruttschnitt, 1996, p. 154, emphasis added).

The problem, as feminists have pointed out, is that quantitative analyses often fail to capture important contextual information that can shed light on the impact of gender on

offending (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Morash, 1999). Although feminist criminologists interested in placing offending in a gendered context may wish to do so using qualitative methodologies that make use of in-depth interviews and observations, these methods often are ignored, trivialized, or dismissed within mainstream criminology in favor of more highly valued quantitative approaches (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Still, feminists argue, criminological theoretical development sometimes necessitates the use of qualitative techniques:

The problem of measures that fail to validly reflect crime can sometimes be solved by using qualitative data as the basis for the development of multidimensional, quantitative measures; however, in some case only qualitative data adequately reflect the phenomenon being studied. (Morash, 1999, pp. 454–455)

An example of the failure of quantitative methodologies to “adequately reflect the phenomenon being studied” is the proposition that perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) is gender-symmetric. Using a survey instrument called the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), Straus and Gelles (1990) and their colleagues (Stets & Straus, 1990) have conducted several broad-based national surveys that measure incidents of violence between intimate partners. Comparing the number of violent incidents reported by men and women, these and other researchers who use the CTS have concluded that women are as violent as men, leading to the formulation of gender-symmetric theories of IPV (e.g., see Dutton, 2006). However, as feminist critics have repeatedly countered (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007; DeKeseredy & MacLean, 1990; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Johnson, 1998; Morash, 1999), the CTS merely “counts blows” and fails to place women’s use of IPV in its appropriate context (for example, by considering when women use violence against their partners in self-defense). By simply summing aggressive acts, the CTS “inadequately captures the seriousness of wife abuse, and exaggerates the seriousness of women’s abuse of men” (Morash, 1999, p. 435). Thus, IPV theories that are based solely on quantitative data may miss important contextual and structural factors that shape men’s and women’s use of violence.

What theoretical solutions does feminist criminology offer? All of this is *not* to say that quantitative methods have no place in feminist criminology or are inherently antifeminist (or, conversely, that qualitative methods are automatically feminist). Indeed, Kruttschnitt (1996) demonstrates the merits of quantitative methodologies for developing and testing gender-based theories of crime, while Johnson (1998) uses data from the Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS) to underscore that statistical data are indeed useful in understanding violence against women. Still, quantitative methodologies alone may fail to capture important contextual information necessary for the development of theory, feminist or otherwise. Thus, one solution is to develop theories using mixed-methods designs, for example, by developing quantitative variables derived from open-ended responses (Kruttschnitt, 1996; Morash, 1999). An alternative strategy is to supplement quantitative data with descriptive data obtained by qualitative methods (Kruttschnitt, 1996). In contrast, Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) advocate the development of “gender-linked” theories using strictly qualitative methods that allow criminologists to “get our hands dirty” and “plunge more deeply into the social world of girls and women” (p. 519).

For example, Miller’s (1986) ethnographic study of female street hustlers in Milwaukee led to important theoretical contributions. Among Miller’s most critical discoveries

was that women are recruited into offending behaviors by their integration into “deviant street networks” (p. 35). As suggested by Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988), Miller “gets her hands dirty” by investigating how women’s social worlds shape their participation in illegal work, and how their social worlds are modeled by structural and cultural changes at the macro-social level. With respect to IPV research, feminist scholars express preference for theoretical frameworks that consider the context within which IPV occurs (e.g., Dobash & Dobash, 1979, 1992). For example, regarding the limited selection of “options” available to battered women in isolated rural areas, Websdale (1998) remarks, “Rural battered women’s ‘choices’ often boil down to remaining with abusers and enduring/resisting violence, leaving the abuser and enduring poverty under the welfare system, or leaving the abuser and entering wage work in a hostile gendered capitalist economy” (p. 171). Such frameworks are often, but not always, developed using qualitative methods. Thus, these theoretical advancements respond to the third feminist criticism of mainstream criminological theory (the appropriate methodology issue) by relying upon methodological strategies that can offer a detailed, nuanced, and contextualized picture of the relationship between gender and crime.

Empirical Evaluations

As described earlier, feminist criminology consists of an array of theories and perspectives that consider gender (as well as race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other systems of power) in the study of crime, law, and deviance. However, the multifaceted nature of feminist criminology does not mean that feminist theories are empirically untestable. In fact, the opposite is true: the last decade in particular has seen a proliferation of empirical work aimed at developing, advancing, and testing feminist criminological theories.

Some of these empirical evaluations address the first feminist criticism of traditional criminological theories: the generalizability issue. Recall that some feminist scholarship aimed at developing gender-specific theories of women’s offending uses the concept of “blurred boundaries” to demonstrate how women’s prior victimization experiences are inextricably linked with their later offending and use of violence (Daly & Maher, 1998). Recent feminist empirical investigations offer support for this idea. For example, Gaarder and Belknap (2002) conducted in-depth interviews with 22 girls incarcerated in an adult women’s prison in order to identify their pathways to crime. Their analysis reveals that intersecting sources of oppression (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality) are salient in the lives of these young women, and that many of their lives are characterized by a confluence of victimization and offending (Gaarder & Belknap, 2002). Similarly, Makarios (2007) uses prospective cohort data to examine the relationship between race, abuse, and girls’ use of violence, and observes that abuse is a stronger predictor of female violence than male violence (although this effect does not vary across race).

Other empirical evaluations address the second feminist criticism of traditional criminological theories: the gender gap issue. One particularly good example of this type of research is Bufkin’s (1999) study of bias crimes, which uses the concepts found in Messerschmidt’s structured action theory to account for men’s greater participation in bias crimes. In her analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, Bufkin concludes that bias crime is one means by which men “do gender.” In other words, men attempt to express their

masculinity by assaulting and victimizing people who contradict the hegemonic masculine ideal (e.g., women, gays and lesbians, and racial and ethnic minorities). She also uses this theoretical framework to address female bias crime, suggesting that such offenses are used by women as a means of gaining power that routinely is denied to them in a patriarchal society. Bufkin therefore theorizes that bias crimes are an attempt to reproduce hegemonic masculine ideals, and thus are more likely to be committed by men than women.

Additionally, Heimer and DeCoster (1999) combine elements of differential association and feminist theories to advance a gendered theory of violent delinquency. An empirical test of their theoretical model using data from the National Youth Survey suggests that violent delinquency is a gendered phenomenon. In particular, the authors conclude that

girls are less violent than boys because they are influenced more strongly by bonds to family, learn fewer violent definitions, and are taught that violence is inconsistent with the meaning of being female. These mechanisms appear to be so effective among girls that direct, overt controls like supervision and coercive discipline contribute little to the explanation of variation in female violence, while they are important for explaining variation in male violence. (p. 303)

Still other empirical evaluations address the third important feminist criticism of traditional criminological theories: the appropriate methodology issue. Contemporary feminist scholars have heeded the call to utilize qualitative (and mixed-methods) designs to develop and test a variety of feminist criminological theories. As previously mentioned, Richie's (1996) life-history analysis of incarcerated battered women and the resulting gender entrapment theory she develops to explain criminality among black battered women is an excellent example of this type of research. Another is Maher's (1997) ethnography of women drug users, an exemplary feminist study in which the author develops a theoretical framework that situates women's participation in the street-level drug economy within intersecting systems of race/ethnicity, class, and gender.

Finally, some empirical evaluations of feminist theories concern issues related to gender and crime more broadly, such as the relationship between gender equality and intimate partner violence, rape, and other forms of violence against women. For example, Yodanis's (2004) cross-national study of violence against women makes an important theoretical contribution. Feminists assert that violence against women is higher in societies in which gender inequality is high, and in which women occupy low social status relative to men. Noting the importance of conducting international and comparative analyses, Yodanis uses data from the International Crime Victims Survey and from the United Nations to examine the relationship between gender inequality, fear, and violence against women. She finds that, in accordance with feminist theory, sexual violence against women in a particular country is negatively correlated with women's status in that country. "The results show that social structural characteristics, particularly women's access to and position in social institutions, are related to rates of sexual violence, and that rates of sexual violence, in turn, are related to women's fear" (p. 672). Similarly, Martin et al. (2006) test feminist models of rape using data from U.S. cities and discover that rape rates are lower in cities where women enjoy higher absolute status (e.g., have higher incomes, percentage of college degrees, labor force participation, and occupational status). Paradoxically, the authors also find rape rates to be *higher* in cities having higher gender equality, which they suggest is indicative of a "backlash effect" (p. 333). Martin and colleagues conclude that, taken

together, results of their analysis offer support for a socialist feminist model of rape that integrates class- and gender-based explanations of women's oppression.

Critiques

Previously I outlined three important feminist criticisms of traditional criminological theories. Feminist criminology has, in turn, received its own fair share of criticism, though the most intense criticism of feminist criminology has come not from mainstream criminologists but from other feminists. Of course, some mainstream criminologists have been critical of feminist scholarship, often on the grounds that it is unscientific, lacks objectivity, has political underpinnings, or is otherwise a threat to "authentic" social science (e.g., see Dutton, 2006). However, more pointed (and legitimate) criticisms have been leveled against feminist criminology from within feminist circles.

For example, writing at the beginning of feminism's third wave in the 1980s and 1990s,² feminist scholars lamented advancement of the "liberation hypothesis" a decade before to explain women's offending (e.g., Belknap, 2001; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Miller, 1986). In the mid-1970s, liberal feminists including Freda Adler (1975) and Rita Simon (1975) hypothesized that the gender gap in offending could be explained by the fact that women's traditional societal roles limit their opportunities for committing crime. Accordingly, an important proposition of this hypothesis is that women's offending rates eventually will converge with those of men due to women's "liberation" through employment outside the home and/or entrance into the managerial and professional ranks—in other words, as women become more like men. However, women's offending rates have remained relatively stable over the last three decades, thereby discrediting this explanation (Belknap, 2001; Kruttschnitt, 1996). For example, after analyzing FBI arrest statistics for men and women at three points in time—1960, 1975, and 1990—Steffensmeier and Allan (1996) conclude:

Although some authors profess to see major changes over time in the female percentage of arrests (e.g., Adler 1975, Simon 1975), the numbers for 1960, 1975, and 1990 are perhaps more remarkable for their similarity than for their differences. For all three periods, the female share of arrests for most categories was 15% or less and was typically smallest for the most serious offenses." (p. 463)

Steffensmeier and Allan further note that the FBI arrest data are corroborated by official victimization data and self-report survey data, both of which suggest that women's participation in serious offending has remained consistently lower than men's over time.

Similarly, Messerschmidt (2002) recognized that, as in the case of the female gang members he studied, women and girls who commit violent crime do not necessarily exhibit masculine characteristics. Critics argued that the liberation hypothesis was especially damaging because it created a moral panic over a new "female offender" that was "more myth than

²Historically, the feminist movement is divided into three eras or "waves." The first wave of feminism began in the United States with the birth of the abolitionist and women's suffrage movements in the mid-to-late 1800s. The women's liberation and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s marked the onset of feminism's second wave. Currently, feminism is in the midst of its third wave, which began during the 1980s and 1990s.

reality," and shifted attention away from more radical feminist criminological approaches focused on men's control of women (Simpson, 1989, p. 610). As noted, these same criticisms also have been directed at more contemporary theories deemed to be mere variations of the liberation hypothesis, including power-control theory (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004a).

More recently, feminists of color, lesbian feminists, and other feminists who felt marginalized within the mainstream feminist movement have condemned the hegemony of white women's experiences both in the broader feminist movement and in feminist criminology specifically (Collins, 2000; Daly & Stephens, 1995; Zinn & Dill, 1996). These scholars, also writing during the genesis of third-wave feminism, recognized that mainstream feminism essentialized women by allowing the experiences of privileged, white women to represent those of all women (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Just as pioneering feminists protested the absence of gender from mainstream criminology, contemporary feminists have protested the absence of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, and other locations of inequality from feminist criminology (Britton, 2000; Daly & Stephens, 1995; Potter, 2006). Consequently, contemporary feminist criminologists have advocated for integrated, intersectional theoretical frameworks that attend to other systems of power besides simply gender (Barak, et al., 2001; Britton, 2000; Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Daly & Stephens, 1995; Flavin, 2001; Potter, 2006; Simpson & Gibbs, 2006), as described in the following section.

Theoretical Refinements

In the roughly 40 years since feminists first made inroads into criminology, there have been tremendous theoretical advancements, as demonstrated by the examples outlined in this essay. In fact, today entire journals are devoted to publishing feminist criminological scholarship, a scenario that was unimaginable during the formative years of feminist criminology. These are remarkable achievements, to be sure, but there is always room for improvement. I have argued elsewhere that theoretical advancement in contemporary feminist criminology requires development of frameworks that simultaneously consider multiple sources of oppression to understand criminological phenomena (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Here I refine this argument even further, and suggest two specific feminist perspectives that are essential for achieving this type of theoretical advancement.

The first essential feminist perspective is *multiracial feminist criminology (MFC)*. MFC is rooted in multiracial feminism, a perspective developed by women of color who recognized the need to construct approaches to studying gender that included considerations of race/ethnicity, class, and other systems of power (Zinn & Dill, 1996). The term *multiracial feminism* emphasizes "race as a power system that interacts with other structured inequalities to shape genders" (Zinn & Dill, 1996, p. 324), and the main focus of this perspective is on interlocking and multiple inequalities (Thompson, 2002; Zinn & Dill, 1996). According to this perspective, gendered relations occur within a complex power hierarchy involving race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, and other systems of power, and in which people are situated in relation to one another (Zinn & Dill, 1996). Feminists who operate from this perspective advocate for an intersectional approach to studying gender that attends to multiple sources of inequality that simultaneously operate at both the macrolevel and microlevel (Andersen & Collins, 2004; Weber, 2001).

Multiracial feminist criminology, and the intersectional race-class-gender framework through which it operates, is essential to the advancement of feminist criminology because

it enables the development of theories that attend to the influence of social location—that is, where one is situated in the societal power hierarchy—on motivations and opportunities for committing crime, as well as on the processing of offenders in the criminal justice system. Additionally, the focus of multiracial feminism on advancing social justice (Zinn & Dill, 1996) allows criminologists to parlay theoretical discoveries into real-world strategies that benefit women, as well as men (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). For example, recent feminist scholarship aimed at theorizing about marginalized women's experiences with intimate partner violence offers guidance for developing culturally sensitive, competent, relevant, and, hopefully, more effective services for battered women, especially those from marginalized social groups (Burgess-Proctor, 2008; see also Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

The second essential feminist perspective is *black feminist criminology (BFC)*. Developed by Potter (2006), BFC draws upon feminist criminology, black feminist theory, and critical race feminist theory to illuminate structural, cultural, and familial forces that shape black women's experiences with intimate partner abuse. Echoing the intersectional principles of MFC, Potter proposes a BFC model that "incorporates the tenets of interconnected identities, interconnected social forces, and distinct circumstances to better theorize, conduct research, and inform policy regarding criminal behavior and victimization among African Americans" (p. 109). Potter notes that traditional feminist criminology is rooted in mainstream feminism, which historically has ignored issues of race/ethnicity in favor of a focus on gender discrimination, as discussed previously. As a corrective, then, BFC "extends beyond traditional feminist criminology to view African American women (and conceivably, other women of color) from their multiple marginalized and dominated positions in society, culture, communities, and families" (p. 107).

Specifically, four themes are considered within Potter's (2006) BFC framework: social structural oppression, black community and culture, intimate and familial relations, and the black woman as an individual. To demonstrate the utility of BFC for feminist criminology, Potter uses these four themes to illuminate black women's experiences with IPV. For example, with respect to the third theme—intimate and familial relations—Potter explains that consideration of generational characteristics of black families, such as embeddedness in "othermothers" and extended family members, can help explain the preference of many black battered women to avoid formal help resources in favor of familial sources of support.

Potter's (2006) black feminist criminology framework is an extremely important—and urgently needed—refinement of feminist criminological theory. In addition, multiracial feminist criminology offers a similarly integrated theoretical framework for understanding the complex linkages between race/ethnicity, class, gender, and crime. However, these are nascent perspectives that have yet to be fully developed by feminist criminologists; indeed, this essay constitutes a first attempt to articulate a specific "multiracial feminist criminology" framework. It is the task of contemporary feminist criminologists, then, to pursue the development of these and other theoretical frameworks that move feminist criminology toward a more inclusive understanding of the complex power hierarchy within which the relationship between gender and crime operates.

Policy Applications

Feminist criminological research has informed, and will continue to inform, crime and justice policies because feminist scholars prioritize the translation of research into action

Flavin, 2001). Indeed, feminism is defined in part by a commitment to developing strategies for change (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988), and support for public policies that enhance equality and social justice is a similarly integral feature of feminism, particularly multiracial feminism (Thompson, 2002). To date, feminist scholarship and activism has shaped a wide variety of public policies, including the development of shelters, hotlines, and other resources for battered women (e.g., see Yllö & Bograd, 1988), the reformation of state rape laws (Berger, Searles, & Neuman, 1988), and the adoption (and subsequent questioning) of mandatory- and pro-arrest laws for IPV (Chesney-Lind, 2002). Contemporary feminist criminologists continue to produce research aimed at influencing and improving any number of criminal justice policies both in the United States and abroad.

For example, feminist criminologists in the United States are conducting policy-relevant research about the American juvenile justice and capital punishment systems. First, Belknap and Holsinger (2006) analyzed data from over 400 incarcerated Ohio youth to explore how risk factors for delinquency are gendered. Though girls in their sample reported higher levels of abuse and victimization than boys, boys self-reported abuse at an "alarmingly high" rate, leading the authors to conclude that intervention strategies for abused children are essential for deterring delinquency (p. 65). Conversely, the authors also recommend that treatment programs in detention facilities be properly equipped to address youths' abuse histories, in order to facilitate desistance upon their release.

Meanwhile, Westervelt and Cook (2007) are conducting truly groundbreaking feminist research with U.S. death-row exonerees. Clearly, improved understanding of how innocent people came to (wrongfully) serve time on death row offers tremendous opportunities for policy refinement, especially with respect to U.S. capital punishment laws. As of this writing the authors remain in the data analysis phase of their project so published results of their study are as yet forthcoming. Of their efforts to approach their research from a solidly feminist perspective, however, the authors write:

We have been explicit in our attempts to maintain our feminist integrity in the research process while studying a group of people whose lived experiences have not been central to most feminist concerns. Thus, we ask: how do we accomplish feminist methodology in the process of interviewing innocent individuals who have been exonerated of capital crimes? Given that our interview participants are predominately men, how do we keep feminist concerns and techniques central to our method? (p. 21)

Feminists outside the United States are engaging in similar policy-rich research, particularly in the area of IPV. One prominent example is efforts of Canadian scholars to counter the developing antifeminist domestic violence and men's/fathers' rights movements both in Canada and across North America (Dragiewicz, 2008; Mann, 2008). Drawing upon the body of research, described previously, that suggests gender parity in perpetration of IPV, men's rights advocates "argue that women are equally or indeed more violent in domestic contexts than men, and that abused women shelters, restraining orders, anti-stalking laws, risk assessment tools, and other feminist-supported anti-domestic violence interventions promote hatred of and bias against men" (Mann, 2008, pp. 44-45). Antifeminist activism in Canada often manifests in requests for the Canadian government to stop funding the women's research agency Status of Women Canada (Mann, 2008), while in the United States such activism often manifests in intense challenges to the federal Violence Against Women Act (Dragiewicz, 2008). Noting that these movements have had

a measurable, negative impact on services and programs for battered women, Dragiewicz asserts that IPV scholars and practitioners "need to understand the tactics of backlash and how they work in order to advance efforts to protect victims of abuse and decrease the occurrence of violence" (p. 138).

In Asia, Haarr's (2007) investigation of Tajik women's attitudes about wife abuse also reveals important insights for the development of antiviolence strategies, this time in nations adhering to strict, patriarchal value systems. For example, the 400 Tajik women Haarr surveyed indicated widespread approval of and tolerance for abuse of women by their husbands and/or mothers-in-law, even going so far as to suggest various circumstances under which wife abuse would be justified. Not surprisingly, justifiable transgressions typically included violations of women's gender-role expectations in traditional Tajik-Islamic culture, such as leaving the house without a husband's permission or being suspected of having extramarital relations. Thus, Haarr concludes that "the challenge facing international organizations and local nongovernmental organizations in Tajikistan is to confront cultural norms and conceptualizations of gender identities, women's roles, wife abuse, and women's rights in awareness-raising events and educational programs" (p. 267).

As these examples reveal, contemporary feminist criminologists frequently engage in research that is aimed at informing and reforming criminal justice policy. Both inside and outside the United States, feminist scholarship has wide-ranging implications for criminal justice policy. Of course, these policy implications often have a particular goal of improving the lives of women and girls—especially those who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

Conclusion

The goal of this essay is to provide readers with a clearer idea of where feminist criminology is today, and also of where it is heading. Despite the major inroads made by feminist scholars in the field of criminology, opportunities for growth remain:

Compared to thirty years ago, more research and policymaking efforts consider feminist theoretical contributions. By and large, however, feminist theories have not been fully integrated into the study and practice of criminal justice and consequently have not received the same attention as varieties of strain theories, social control theories, or individualist theories. As a result, the richness and insight of feminist perspectives have yet to be widely appreciated. (Flavin, 2001, p. 277)

Hopefully, this essay underscores the benefit of feminist theoretical developments in criminology, and in turn encourages new scholars to appreciate the insights feminist theories can offer the discipline. With continued appreciation of the many benefits of feminist scholarship, the goal many feminists share of witnessing complete integration of feminist theories alongside strain, control, and other canonical criminological frameworks may soon be realized.