

Reviewing criticisms
feminist writers made
of criminology
criminology essay



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Feminism, according to Mitchell and Oakley (1986: 3) suggest that it is 'easier to define feminism in its absence rather than its presence.' Delmar (1986) defines it that, a feminist holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have needs which are neglected and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs requires a radical change. However, he clearly states that in order distinguish feminists or feminism from the multiplicity of those concerned with women issues, feminism should be defined as a field, even though diverse, but women can make no claim to an exclusive interest in or copyright over problems affecting women. Feminist criminology therefore proceeds from the assertion that women have been highly marginalised and are all too often invisible and when they have been the centre of attention this has not been observed and treated with sympathy. At the heart of feminist criminology, a critique of extant criminology lurks for the reasons below, the failure to theorise or engage in the empirical study of female offending, the neglect of female victimisation and, particularly, male violence against women and the over concentration on the impact of the criminal justice system on male offenders.

Carol Smart (1976) raised two crucial areas of concern. These were; that there was a particular danger of studying women separately from men would cause more marginalisation and this would also lead to the perpetuation of a male dominated criminology and the second one was that, increasing academic attention on female crime could have the unintended and undesirable consequence of increasing public and criminal justice attention on these activities. Smart also argued that, women offenders were not only

being treated as criminals but also as having transgressed their gender roles. Edwards (1984: 213) said, " Female defendants are processed within the criminal justice system in accordance with the crimes which they committed and the extent to which the commission of the act and its nature deviate from appropriate female behaviour."

Smart questioned the criminology enterprise and led to a considerable debate on feminism. (Edwards, 1981; Heindensohn, 1985; Rafter and Stanko, 1980; Young, 1996) Pat Carlene (1992) described the idea of feminist criminology as neither desirable nor possible. However, Gelsthorpe and Morris (1990) have said that criminology has been a major constraining rather than creative influence for feminist writers and researchers. Another critique, Cain (1989) argued that courts, victims, lawyers, social workers could be objects of investigation however our explanations must reach beyond and encompass all of them, this in a sense argued that feminist criminology is not possible and it disrupts the other categories of criminology itself. Cain's argument was that work in theoretical criminology should question the assumptions of traditional criminology and also examine how gender is constructed by the official bodies', however; she was not purely dismissive of feminist criminology. Carlen (1992) was similar sceptically however she was arguing for the potential within feminist scholarships which would help in transcending the limitations of criminology as a discipline.

On the other hand, the left realist were critical and said critique is not consistent, that is to say, criticising criminology for its real essentialism in treating crime like a meaningful category yet on the other hand using terms like rape and child sexual abuse yet they may also not be subject to the <https://assignbuster.com/reviewing-criticisms-feminist-writers-made-of-criminology-criminology-essay/>

same criticism. (Mathew and Young, 1992) Feminist criminology criticises theoretical criminology because it was constructed by men and for men. It is argued by Valier (2002) that it does not analytically explain the different patterns in crimes carried out by females. He further points out that most of the theories do not analytically explain patterns of crime by females; these theories will only show what the social scientists are finding out presently which is that they do not seek to explain human behaviour as they claim but only explain understandings of male behaviour. This is not good practice because it has instead created a single theoretical canopy for both women and men even when it is clearly evident that their social realistic are very different. (Valier, 2002)

Frances Heidensohn (1987) looked at four different characteristics of many of the female offenders which had been the subject of recent research in the past decades. These characteristics would then be used to carry out analytical research on female criminology and also help understand female offending better. The four characteristics that she looked at included; Economic rationality, women were predominantly involved in property crimes which were motivated by the economic concerns. This was different from what the earlier portrayals of Lombroso and Pollak which understood female criminality to be illustrative of irrationality and the influence of biology. Second characteristic was that of heterogeneity of their offences whereby women commit less crimes as compared to men and are less likely to be recidivists or professional criminals which implies that they contribute less to the crime tariffs and also clarifies that crimes committed by males and females derive from different conditions like social circumstances,

differences in opportunities for both men and women and the socialisation process. The third characteristic is fear and impact of deviant stigma. This is whereby the criminalisation process has a differential impact on men and women. This is because female offending is less extensive than male offending, produces a greater sense of stigmatisation. The last characteristic was that of experience of double deviance and double jeopardy. Double deviance like being dubbed as 'unlike woman' together with the being called a criminal produces double jeopardy. The criminal justice system will punish the crime but also seek to impose controls over women behaviour.

(Heidensohn, 2006)