

### Explanations for Patterns of Crime: Gender

Opportunities for criminal behaviour

\* Female involvement in criminal activity is not restricted to a few areas. While females do not tend to commit crimes of violence (violence by females tends to occur within the family, mainly as a final response to male violence), they are involved in a wide cross-section of crime.

\* Therefore, while, in theory, women have similar opportunities as men to commit crime these may be limited by other factors...

\* In terms of the ratio of conviction between females and males, where women have similar opportunities for criminal behaviour in relation to males, their respective patterns of crimes appear to be broadly similar:

For example, where female crime most-closely approximates to male crime is in relation to shop-lifting and it's no coincidence that in this area of their social lives women have similar opportunities for crime to men.

\* Marsh ("Sociology In Focus: Crime", 1986): "In areas where females have similar opportunities to men they appear as likely to break laws"

Opportunity Structures

\* Where opportunity structures differ, so too does the pattern of crime:  
For example, burglary is predominantly a male crime and one way of explaining the difference is that this type of crime tends to be a relatively solitary pursuit that takes place late at night. A female alone late at night is both more-likely to: **Attract attention** and / or **Involve some degree of personal danger**.

\* Employment related crime: Fewer women than men work, therefore, less opportunity exists.  
Women tend to occupy less powerful positions within an organisation. They are more-likely to be subject to close supervision, have less opportunity for acting on their own initiative, unsupervised and so forth. Hence, they generally have less opportunity for committing "white-collar" crimes such as fraud, embezzlement, etc.

\* Women are more-likely than men to have primary responsibility for child-care, which restricts opportunities for various types of criminal behaviour

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<p>Primary / Secondary Socialisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Male gender socialization prompts men to be more aggressive and more-likely to solve p[roblems using violence.</li> <li>* Female gender socialization prompts women to be less aggressive and more-likely to see=k non-violent solutions to problems.</li> <li>* Peer pressure: Different influences for males (eg gang / street-corner behaviour) and females (bedroom culture: McIntosh)</li> <li>* Male socialisation stresses active, individualistic, behaviour</li> <li>* Female socialisation stresses passive, sharing / caring, behaviour</li> <li>* Media emphasises male role as “breadwinner” / “family provider” may increase pressure on men.</li> <li>* Media emphasises female role as “carer” decreases pressure on women to act as family provider.</li> <li>* Marsh ("Sociology In Focus: Crime", 1986): "In the world of organised, professional, crime, sex-segregation is the norm. Women are likely to be viewed in terms of traditional sex-role stereotypes, as unreliable, emotional, illogical and so on. Moreover, males tend to see the crimes they commit as too dangerous for women, or too difficult, or their masculine pride may not be willing to accept women as organisers of crime, as 'bosses'".</li> </ul>
<p>Social Control Agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Much female crime involves "sexual delinquency" (especially "status offences" - running away from home, being in "moral danger" and so forth). It involves behaviour which, in the adult world is not classified as criminal / delinquent. This may account for a great deal of young female "crime" and also explains why older females do not appear to commit as much crime as older males.</li> <li>* This form of explanation focuses upon the idea that females in our society are socialised and controlled differently to males. Female socialisation stresses passivity as a feminine characteristic (which might help to explain something about the relative lack of female violence) . <b>Abbott and Wallace</b> ("An Introduction To Sociology: Feminist Perspectives", 1990) note female behaviour is more closely watched / strictly controlled within the family.</li> <li>* Female sexuality is more heavily "policed" than young male sexual behaviour.</li> <li>* As females are given more freedom we would expect them to become involved in various forms of criminal behaviour. Police and judicial expectations may be significant, since if the police start to see females differently, the likely development is greater levels of arrest and criminalisation. This appears to be happening, insofar as more females are being subjected to a process of criminalisation.</li> <li>* Men have greater freedom within the family than women, giving more opportunity to commit crimes. Eg: Young women: parents restrict who they associate with / control times they can associate with friends etc. Adult women: freedom may be limited by family responsibilities.</li> </ul>

### Explanations for Patterns of Crime: Gender

Police:  
Strategies  
Labelling  
(Stereotypes  
and  
Scapegoats)

\* Police have an ideological conception of both crime and criminals, which they use as a guide-line in their work. The more that the idea of an association between young males and crime becomes established, the more the process of criminalisation begins to resemble a self-fulfilling prophecy:

\* Young males need to be policed because of their heavy involvement in crime. The police know they are heavily involved in crime because large numbers are arrested and convicted. Therefore, the more young men are closely policed, the more any involvement in crime is picked-up...

\* Men more-likely than women to be on the streets at night (inviting greater police suspicion / investigation).

Police / judicial stereotypes are a factor. If control agents have stereotyped views about "typical criminals", they may not place women so easily into this type of category. They may, therefore, be: Less likely to suspect / arrest females.

Less likely to punish females through jail sentences (since women may not be perceived as "real criminals").

\* Police / courts more-willing to adopt a "medical model" of female crime, whereby women who commit crimes are believed to be acting "abnormally"; therefore a medical explanation for their behaviour appears "more-appropriate" in this context - women "couldn't help themselves" and they therefore require treatment rather than punishment - a form of "**reverse sexism**", whereby women receive lighter punishment for their behaviour than men because, by going against male norms regarding female behaviour, men have to explain this behaviour in terms of "sickness", "emotional stresses", etc.

\* Underestimation of female involvement in crime because:  
Stereotyped beliefs about women held by powerful (male) control agents.  
Tighter social controls on many female activities.  
Limited opportunity structures for women to engage in criminal behaviour.

Judicial  
behaviour  
Labelling  
Stereotypes  
Medical  
models

- \* Courts may deal more-leniently with females: sometimes called the “**Chivalry** factor”. However, when women commit crimes that go against male stereotypes of femininity (violence, for example) women tend to be more harshly punished than men.
- \* Much female crime is petty, non-violent etc. (the two most popular tending to be shop-lifting and prostitution - the latter being an interesting example of a double-standard, whereby women can be criminalised for selling sex whilst men can't be criminalised for buying it...), therefore, women not imprisoned as often as men.
- \* In relation to shop-lifting, there has been a recent tendency, by the courts, social workers and so forth, to see this type of female behaviour more of a "cry for help" than outright criminal behaviour. Again, this may simply represent sexist attitudes towards female behaviour or indeed the "medicalisation" of some forms of crime, whereby criminal behaviour is seen to be a symptom of some form of psychological malaise.
- \* Most prostitutes end-up in prison because they could not afford to pay the fine levied on them (which suggests that large numbers of female prostitutes may make very little money from their activities).

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Social  
Visibility  
Of crime and  
criminals

- \* Female forms of crime may be "less visible" to the police etc. This is especially true in relation to crimes of violence, where women tend to be the victims rather than the perpetrators (especially in relation to domestic violence where it is estimated that 95% of violence within the family is directed by males at females - how reliable such a statistic might be I leave to you to judge).
- \* Much male crime (eg crimes of violence, petty theft) involves clear victims and is likely to be witnessed.
- \* Police have an ideological conception of both crime and criminals, which they use as a guide-line in their work. The more the idea of an association between males and crime becomes established, the more the process of criminalisation begins to resemble a self-fulfilling prophecy. Police are more-likely to closely-watch behaviour of men.
- \* Crimes such as child abuse / family violence largely invisible to the police – rely on victims to complain.

Lifestyle  
Factors

- \* Men more-likely to out at night, in clubs, pubs, etc. where alcohol / illegal drugs are used. May lead to "loss of control" and relatively minor forms of crime as well as violence.
- \* Older women (and men) less likely to be in public areas at night. Any crimes will be committed in privacy of the home.