**Gender and Crime**

Statistics indicatethat men are more likely to commit crime than [women](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/women_crime.htm). For example, in 2002 80% of known offenders (481,000+) were men. As there are a number of problems with the reliability and validity of statistics, an alternative to information are self-report studies. These are anonymous and some believe because they all but guarantee anonymity they encourage respondents to be more truthful than if they were involved in an interview. In the past, sociologists tended to pay attention to only males committing crimes and ignored gender differences. This began to change in the 1970’s when feminists such as Carol Smart looked into woman and crime and began to ask questions such as:

• Why do woman commit fewer crimes than men?

• Why are woman more likely to commit to social norms compared to men?

• Is there anything distinctive about a woman's experience as an offenders and as victims of crime?

• Are woman treated differently than men in the [justice system](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/criminal_justice_system.htm)?

There is now an agreement within [sociology](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/sociology.htm) that when studying [crime](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/crime_deviance.htm) and [deviance](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/crime_deviance.htm) we must take into account gender. This means we must also ask questions about men.

• What is the relationship between crime and masculinity?

Sex role theory: this theory argues that boys and girls are socialized differently, therefore resulting in boys becoming more delinquent. There are different versions of this theory. Edwin Sutherland (1949) stated that there are clear gender differences when it comes to socialization. Firstly, girls are more supervised and more strictly controlled. Secondly, boys are encouraged to take risks and to be tough and aggressive. Therefore, boys have more of an opportunity and an inclination to commit crime. Talcott Parsons (1995) believes that there are clear and obvious gender roles within the nuclear family. The father performs roles which show him to be more of the leader and provider, whilst the mother performs the expressive role of giving emotional support and socializing children. These roles are rooted from the birth of their children as mothers have to give birth and nurse children.

Girls have a readily available female role model at home (their mother) whereas boys have less access to their male role model as traditionally the father was out at work for most of the time. Boys will be socialized largely by their mother and will tend to reject behavior that is seen as feminine as they compulsively pursue masculinity. Because of the emphasis on toughness and aggression this encourages anti-social behavior and delinquency. Albert Cohen (1955) believed that if boys don’t have that readily available role model, socialization can be a difficult process. Boys can experience anxiety about their identity as a young man and a solution for this is all male peer groups or street gangs. In these social contexts, aspects of masculinity can be expressed and rewarded. The idea of being tough and breaking rules can help to conform to the idea of masculinity.

The feminist perspectives on who is involved in crime starts from the view that society is patriarchal and woman can only be understood under male dominance. Pat Carlen (1990) stated that a woman's crimes can be known as ‘the crimes of the powerless’ as many woman who commit crimes are powerless in some way. For example, they live in poverty with little power to change the situation; as children they may have been badly treated and looked after, perhaps being abused by fathers. As adults they have often lived under the dominance of male partners who asserted control - perhaps in the form of violence.

After interviews with 39 woman aged 15 to 46 convicted of various offences, Carlen drew on the control theory – saying that woman turn to crime when the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. It appeared that the interviewed women turned to crime as a rational choice. Low paid work and unemployment had not led to the standard of living they hoped for, and living an unhappy life as children and as adults was very unfulfilling. Unrewarded by family and the workplace and with little power to change the situation, crime was a rational alternative. However, critics of Carlen claim that her sample of woman was too small to make generalized statements. Her research also suggests that conformity to social norms tends to break down when the rewards for doing so are absent.

Conformity and control: According to Frances Heidensohn the striking thing about woman's behaviour is their conformity to social norms. Taking in mind the control theory, women have more to lose than men if they deviate from social norms. And looking from a feminist view, she argues that in a male-dominated society the control of woman by men discourages deviance from norms. In the home and family, women still have the primary responsibility for raising children and taking on the domestic work. Their commitment to this also means they are committing to the conformity of the traditional mother-housewife role and socializing their children in terms of society’s norms and values. Women have been socialized to conform. Girls are more strictly supervised and given less freedom, they are expected to perform household duties. These expectations and control have been carried on into adult life. As adults, women are not only controlled by their childhood socialization but also by their male partners.

Woman who challenge these traditional roles are often brought into line by men’s financial and physical power. According to Heidensohn, wife battering is an assertion of patriarchal authority. Women's socialization, domestic responsibilities plus the control imposed on them by men discourage the deviance from social norms. Their lives are centered on the home so they have less freedom to go out. As a result they have less inclination, less time and fewer opportunities to commit crime.

Beyond the home a woman's freedom to deviate from social norms is also limited in a number of ways; for example, some women do not want to go out after dark as they are in fear of getting attacked or raped by men. A young woman’s fear of being attacked by a stranger is five times greater than a young male’s. They are also less likely to deviate from norms of respectability for fear of being labeled promiscuous.

In a working environment men are more likely than women to be in control, in positions such as supervisory or managerial roles, and surveys indicate that sexual harassment is common in the workplace and it is a further indication of male power and control which is often experienced as intimidating by women.

Both inside and outside the home, there is pressure for woman to conform- and this is reinforced by male power.

Crime and masculinities:

Research into gender over the last 25 years has mainly been concerned with woman and crime as it was seen as a new topic after decades of research into men and crime. Feminists would focus on woman and men would enter the equation in terms of the control men had over woman. Researchers now recognize that there is another side to gender and crime and start to ask questions such as:

Why are men more likely to commit crime than woman? And is there a relationship between male crime and masculinity?

Gender identity is a vital part of the individual’s sense of self - it is something that people accomplish. People are continuously trying to express and present their masculinity or femininity. And in relation to crime, you can say men commit crime as a means of constructing this masculinity to express to others and themselves. There are a number of different masculinities which are shaped by social class, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation. Men’s position in society provides them with different access to power and resources which leads to different constructions and expressions of masculinity – and this leads to different types of crime. The most dominant form of masculinity is known as hegemonic masculinity. It’s the most ideal form, which is defined through work in paid labour, the subordination of women, heterosexism and the uncontrollable sexuality of men. Most men wish to accomplish this.

The alternative is subordinated masculinities. They include masculinities which develop in some ethnic minority and lower class groups and homosexual masculinity.

Young middle-class white males are usually able to demonstrate some of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity through success at school or college. But this comes at a price – subordination to teachers. Some assert their masculinity outside of school through vandalism, petty theft and heavy drinking. White working- class males are less likely to be successful in education. They sometimes resist school and construct their masculinity around physical aggression, anti-social behaviour, delinquency and some cases violence towards gays and members of ethnic minority groups.

Lower working class men from ethnic minority groups with little expectation of educational success or secure employment sometimes assert their masculinity in street gangs. With little chance of accomplishing hegemonic masculinity by legitimate means, they are more likely to turn to robbery and serious property crime.

Even middle class males who have the resources to accomplish hegemonic masculinity use crime to express masculinity. James Messerschmidt argues that white collar and corporate crime are not simply a means for profiting the individual or the organization. There are also a means of accomplishing hegemonic masculinity as a successful breadwinner and as an aggressive risk-taking male

Working class crime in the workplace can also be seen as a means of accomplishing masculinity. Workers sometimes resist the authority of management by theft and industrial sabotage.

Messerschmidt uses the example of African-Americans to illustrate a subordinated masculinity. Lower class African-Americans males often lack the resources to accomplish hegemonic masculinity. The pimp and hustler are long-established roles in African-American subculture and are often seen as an alternative to subordinated masculinity. The pimp looks after a number of prostitutes and lives of their earnings. With their expensive car, diamond rings and power over women, Messerschmidt argues that the pimp demonstrates a highly visible alternative masculinity to himself and others.