

1992

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Recommended Citation

Wasely Lomire, Patricia Ann (1992) "'Women and Crime" in Criminology Textbooks," *Great Plains Sociologist*. Vol. 5 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/greatplainsociologist/vol5/iss1/6>

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"Women and Crime" In Criminology Textbooks

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Introduction

A review of recent literature suggests that considerable debate has emerged on the limited coverage of "women and crime" topics in criminology textbooks (Wright, 1987; Schur, 1984; Gibbons, 1982; Balkan, Berge and Schmidt 1980; and Wilson and Rigsby, 1975). This debate¹ apparently escalated as a result of the 1975 publication "Is Crime a Man's World? Issues in the Exploration of Criminality" by Nancy Wilson and Constance Rigsby (Wright, 1987). Following a review of this article, Richard Wright (1987) critiqued a total of 52 textbooks (1956-1985) and indeed found that less than three percent of the actual page coverage of the average newer criminology text incorporated 'women and crime' topics. Wright's research provided support for the problem identified by Wilson and Rigsby, but he found no evidence for their justification of the exclusion. Wilson and Rigsby attributed the limited coverage to an apparent lack of empirical research on women and crime. Following an examination of 2,271 citations from (1956-1960 and 1976-1980), Wright found a dramatic increase in published research on female-relate topics in criminology (1987:418).

The purpose of this research note is to encourage both students and faculty to critically evaluate assumptions regarding the limited coverage of

¹ Nanci Wilson and Constance J. Rigsby (1975) are often cited for their feminist critique of gender in criminology. However, Rose Giallombardo's *Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison* (1966) was the first important modern feminist- oriented treatise on criminology (Wright, 1987:418)

"women and crime" topics in contemporary criminology textbooks. The specific objectives are 1) to briefly review the research findings of Richard A. Wright's 1987 article entitled "Are Sisters in Crime Finally Being Booked? The Coverage of Women and Crime in Journals and Textbooks"; 2) to evaluate the coverage of female-related topics in 631 articles from *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal--The Official Publication of the American Society of Criminology, (1970-1989)*; 3) to critique a variety of explanations for the apparent exclusion of "women and crime" topics from criminology texts; and 4) to offer several recommendations for the inclusion of a feminist perspective in criminology courses so that faculty may compensate for the inadequacies of present texts. The basic premise upon which this paper is built is that increased consciousness of feminist issues may encourage a revision of belief systems and consequently actualize a restructuring of criminology textbooks in the future.

Review of Literature

Wilson and Rigsby (1975) examined the actual page coverage of "women and crime" topics in 17 criminology texts published between the years of 1952 to 1974 and concluded that textbooks showed little improvement in the coverage of female-related topics. Wright (1987) examined 14 texts published from 1956 to 1965 and found that only 2.11 percent of the texts covered "women and crime" topics. He also compared 38 textbooks published between 1976 and 1985 and found that 2.98 percent of the space of the average newer text dealt with women and crime. Wright found no statistically significant relationship between the two comparison periods ($t = .56$; $df = 48$; $p > .20$).

In a review of *Sociological Abstracts* Wright (1987) compared criminology article citations for two periods (1956-1960 and 1976-1980) and found that journal data revealed a marked increase on women and crime. His

findings illustrate that Sociological Abstracts lists the publication of only 23 articles on women and crime from 1956 to 1960, but lists 434 entries from 1976 to 1980. Wright concluded that a comparison of the two periods clearly shows that research on women and crime has increased dramatically (1987:418). In the first period, 7.01 percent of the 328 criminology articles dealt with female topics; from 1976 to 1980, 22.34 percent of the 1,943 articles dealt with the subject (Wright, 1987:418). Consequently, the data suggests that despite impressive recent increases in the publication of research on women and crime, criminology texts show little improvement in the coverage of these topics (Wright, 1987:418).

Method

Data was obtained from a content analysis² of journal titles from *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (The Official Publication of the American Society of Criminology). A total of 631 journal article titles were reviewed from February, 1970 (Volume 7, Number 4) to November, 1989 (Volume 27, Number 4). "Women and crime" topics were identified and then tallied for each year in order to acquire the percentage of female-related topics to total topics. The two decades were then compared to determine if a significant difference between mean averages was acquired.

² The following list of terms were identified as "women and crime" topics: feminist, gender, wife, intersexual, female, women, sex, women's liberation, sex differences, girls, female delinquency, gender roles, female criminality, and six crimes. Wright (1987) includes a variety of additional topics including abortion, lesbianism, pornography, property crimes committed by women, prostitution, rape, sex differences in crime rates, sexism, sexual harassment, violent crimes committed by women, woman battering, women as system employees, women and the law, women in prison, women and drugs, father daughter incest, heterosexual child molestation, premenstrual tension as an explanation for crime, and sex reassignment by surgery (1987:420).

Findings³

The results of a content analysis⁴ from 1970 to 1989 indicate that in 1970, 1972, 1973, and 1974 no "women and crime" topics were identified. Major peaks in "women and crime" topics occurred in 1971 (8.0%), 1975 (7.14%), 1982 (15.79%), and 1989 (18.75%). One possible explanation for the 1975 increase is that the Journal of Criminal Justice published Nanci Wilson and Constance Rigsby's article "Is Crime a Man's World? Issues in the Exploration of Criminality." Wright (1978) suggests that this highly critical

³ Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal was selected for this study primarily because it is the official publication of the American Society of Criminology, and secondly, because following the results of a 1988 Minot State University survey of journal usage, this journal was used more frequently than any other criminology journal. The 1988 survey reviewed the usage of Crime and Delinquency, Crime Laboratory Digest, Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal, Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, Justice Quarterly Issues, Criminology, Law and Society Review, Federal Probation, Law and Contemporary Problems, and Journal of Police Science and Administration. Additional journals that may be reviewed for "women and crime" topics include: British Journal of Criminology, Juvenile Justice, Prison, Journal, Canadian Journal of Criminology and Corrections, Canadian Police College Journal, Criminological Theory, International Journal of Criminology and Penology, American Journal of Corrections, Criminal Justice Ethics, Criminal Justice Review, and Journal of Criminal Justice.

⁴ Findings from 1970-1979 include: 10 observations; minimum = 0; maximum 8.0; mean average = 2.8; standard deviation = 2.9; standard error 0.931; and a coefficient of variation = 105.9. Findings from 1980-1989 include: 10 observations; minimum = 5.7; maximum = 18.7; mean average = 10.8%; standard deviation = 4.0; standard error = 1.255; and a coefficient of 36.6. Actual percentages of "women and crime" topics for each year include: 1970 (0.0%), 1971 (8.0%), 1972 (0.0%), 1973 (0.0%), 1974 (0.0%), 1975 (7.14%), 1976 (3.23%), 1977 (3.45%), 1978 (3.23%), 1979 (2.78%), 1980 (7.89%), 1981 (7.50%), 1982 (15.79%), 1983 (12.12%), 1984 (9.38%), 1985 (5.71%), 1986 (8.82%), 1987 (10.53%), 1988 (11.54%), 1989 (18.75%).

article may have immediately influenced decisions to increase the publication of female-related topics.

From 1961 to 1982, female topics increased from 7.5 to 15.79 percent. This increase was primarily attributed to the November, 1982 journal publication which included three articles: 'Sex Difference in Self-Report Delinquency' by Rachell Canter, "Women's Liberation and Increases in Minor, Major, and Occupational Offenses" by Roy Austin, and "Gender Ascription and the Stereotyping of Deviants" by Dretha Phillips and Lois DeFleur. From 1982 to 1985, female topics decreased from 15.79 to 5.71 percent; whereas, from 1985 to 1989, there had been a steady increase from 5.71 to 18.75 percent. A recent journal publication (November, 1989) contained three female-related topics: "Feminist Theory, Crime, and Justice" by Sally Simpson, "Assessing Age and Gender Differences in Perceived Risk and Fear of Crime" by Randy LaGrange and Kenneth Ferraro, and "Gender and Varieties of White-Collar Crime" by Kathleen Daly (see the Appendix to this article for a complete list of the 1970-1989 articles). Of the 79 journals reviewed from 1970 to 1989, Volume 27-Number 4 (November 1989) contained the highest percentage of "women and crime" articles (33.3 percent). In conclusion, this review of articles indicates that a substantial increase in "women and crime" publications has occurred during the last two decades. Of the 285 articles reviewed from 1970 to 1979, 2.78 percent of those articles incorporated a female-related topic. From 1980 to 1989, 346 articles were reviewed with 10.80 percent of the articles including a "women and crime" topic.

Discussion

Tradition dictates that gender issues in criminology textbooks remain "invisible" or "ghettoized" into a single chapter on gender. Mainstreaming "women and crime" topics into texts remains an ideal, rather than a reality. Reid (1985) offers several explanations for the exclusion of female-related topics from criminology textbooks: 1) female offenders and victims are

proportionately underrepresented in the total population of offenders and victims; 2) the crimes attributed stereotypically to women (e.g., prostitution and shoplifting) are perhaps not thought by textbook authors to pose a serious threat to society's "moral fiber"; and 3) incarcerated females may be less interesting to authors than incarcerated males because they are believed to be less violent and less disruptive than males (Reid, 1985). Although these statements may represent an empirical reality, they are weak excuses for the exclusion of "women and crime" topics. Females may, in fact, represent a numerical minority of offenders, victims, and prisoners. Nevertheless, females are conceptually and theoretically a significant sociological minority--i.e., a significant component of the entire criminal justice system.

An additional justification for the exclusion of female-related topics from textbooks has been offered by Wilson and Rigsby (1975). They speculate that criminology texts ignore "women and crime" topics because of a lack of empirical research on female-related topics. The findings of this paper suggest that Wilson and Rigsby provide a weak excuse for female exclusion. A content analysis of "women and crime" topics from *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal* suggests a statistically significant increase in female-related topics from 1970-1979 to 1980-1989.⁵

Recommendations

Understanding of a social phenomenon is most adequately achieved by describing, interpreting, and critically evaluating each interrelated component of the total structure. An understanding of intergroup relations within any given power hierarchy must incorporate an analysis of the

⁵ A t-test comparing the mean averages of the 79 journals for the 1970-1979 period (mean = 2.78) with the 1980-1989 period (mean 10.80) showed a statistically significant difference ($t = 4$, $df 77$, $p > 0.000$).

association between majority and minority group behavior. Females represent a numerical minority of offenders, victims, and prisoners in empirical reality. Consequently, they remain "invisible" or 'ghettoized" into contemporary criminology textbooks. This paper strongly recommends "mainstreaming" female-related topics into all areas of classroom discussion related to criminal justice issues.

Students and faculty can compensate for the inadequacies of particular textbooks with a variety of "women and crime" discussions, activities, and in-class lectures. Recommendations for "mainstreaming" female-related topics include: 1) increase awareness of female exclusion by critiquing the criminology textbooks examined by Wright; 2) offer explanations and recommendations for female inclusion by designing course objectives that focus on reviews of "women and crime" journal articles; 3) identify and critique traditional arguments that perpetuate the myth that "crime is a man's world"; 4) examine articles identified in the appendix of this paper and refer to the list of journals identified in the "Notes" section for additional sources; 5) incorporate empirical research on gender and crime into daily discussions and avoid "ghettoizing" these topics into an isolated segment of the course; 6) perceive females as interrelated into a complex network of criminal behavior; and 7) provide female and male students with an opportunity to interpret "women and crime" issues from a feminist perspective.⁶ Although the specific techniques for the aforementioned recommendations may vary by each individual instructor, there is one approach that may act as a springboard for

⁶ Complete names of text book authors used by Wright are provided in his appendix. Of the 1956-1965 authors, 19 are listed (18 males and 1 female). For the 1976-1985 period, 52 authors are listed (47 males and 5 females). Wright categorized the percentage of text devoted to coverage of women and crime into five categories for the 1956-1965 period. The one female author of a textbook (Ruth Cavan, 1962) was ranked in the highest category for the most coverage of women and crime for that period--i.e., Cavan devoted one entire chapter to the topic of women in prisons (Wright, 1987:419).

feminist discussion. Following a reading of Freda Adler's *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal* (1975), students may critically examine feminist issues such as female passivity as a genetic fact or cultural myth, women in wonderland as a psychotropic connection, the link between opportunity and offense in rape, and new crimes--old corrections.

The Appendix to this paper provides a list of female-related topics found in *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (1970-1989).⁷ Topics related to females include delinquency, homicides, roles, race, social class, probation, prison, handgun ownership, family, self-report violence, age, drug addiction, violence, rehabilitation, and white-collar crime. Both students and faculty should attempt to "mainstream" these valuable articles into all areas of classroom activity in order to increase understanding of the role of gender in our criminal justice system. Perhaps, in the future, feminist issues may emerge as an integral part of criminology textbooks and feminist authors of texts may bring about a dramatic change in our traditional approach to understanding gender and crime.

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⁷ Future research on the issue of female exclusion from criminology textbooks may focus on the relationship between the gender of authors and the coverage of "women and crime" topics. Wright's sample of textbook authors provides little evidence for generalizations about the association between female authorship and coverage of female-related topics. However, a review of the "women and crime" articles in *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal* illustrates that during the 1970-1979 period, 50 percent of those articles were written by female authors. The figure increased to 62 percent for the 1980-1989 period.

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