6

Feminist Perspectives

CHAPTER CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

Chapter 6 provides:

- An introduction to feminist approaches to criminology, with particular reference to the issues relevant to the study of gangs.
- A statistical overview of the relationship between age, gender and ethnicity in gang research, with attention to the intersections between these variables.
- An overview of classic feminist studies of gangs, incorporating both a history of their development over time and principal theoretical debates.
- An up-to-date analysis of the impact of feminist approaches on gang research, with coverage of emergent trends and perspectives.

KEY TERMS

- Age
- Desistance
- 'Doing gender'
- Femininity
- Gender
- Masculinity
- Patriarchal bargain
- Patriarchy

- 'Race' and ethnicity
- Relationality
- Sex
- Sexuality
- Street culture
- Structured action
- Trauma
- Victimisation

Introduction

The 2014 French film *Bande de filles* – literally translated as 'gang of girls' but released as *Girlhood* in the UK – follows the life of a young black woman in the Parisian banlieue. The young woman, Marieme, experiences institutional-ised racism in school and bullying on the streets, and falls in with a group of young women who offer her friendship and protection. Together, they kill time on the streets of Paris – talking, laughing, winding each other up – while navigating the macho street culture of young men on their estate. They shop-lift, party and fight together – in one memorable scene, the group use the profits from an afternoon of shoplifting to party in a hotel room, dancing to Rihanna's 'Diamonds'. Later, Marieme performs a different form of femininity as she binds her breasts, boxes and works for a local drug-dealer. Although the film depicts issues such as gangs, crime and street culture, it has been widely praised for demonstrating the complex and collective ways that young women in marginalised social positions enact gender, negotiate respect and create community. Unlike the majority of films depicting youth crime, it avoids easy

stereotypes but deals unflinchingly with the lived realities of everyday life on the margins of the global city. *Girlhood* was remarkable in that it told the stories of young women in all their complexity, exploring the gendered spaces of the streets, and the individual and collective ways in which young women navigated, negotiated and subverted those spaces.

In many ways, *Girlhood* marks a turning point in cinematic depictions of youth crime and culture in urban contexts. Though there are numerous depictions of youth-based street cultures around the world – discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 – the vast majority of portrayals have focused on young men's experiences, involved male directors, and where young women featured they are most often depicted in stereotyped ways as either 'tomboys' or 'sex-objects', inferior and subordinated to the more powerful males. Following a similar pattern, in recent years both media and academic depictions of young women involved in gangs have seen something of a shift. Media representations have shifted from depictions of 'ladette culture' and the apparently increasing female violence, towards a more complex range of portrayals. Similarly, researchers have increasingly shifted from studies of gangs that focused solely on young men, and masculine street culture, to studies that explore the complexity of gender-dynamics within gang contexts. Where gang research was once a striking example of 'malestream' research – in which men's voices assume a privileged position – increasingly feminist epistemologies, methodologies and methods have come to the fore. This work – drawing on the critical traditions in research methodology discussed in Chapter 2 – recognises that both young men and women, of different ages, class backgrounds and ethnic heritage, identify with gangs. These approaches draw attention not only to gender but the intersection of gender with other social structures that collectively structure the experiences of both young men and women involved in gangs.

In this chapter, these ideas will be traced through a number of key areas. The chapter will elaborate the broad contours of feminist approaches to criminology, focusing on their influence on gang research. The chapter will trace the development of gendered approaches to gangs, from traditional 'malestream' criminology to contemporary perspectives that problematise the epistemological underpinnings of such approaches, applying more nuanced analyses of these core formulations. The role of both femininities and masculinities in gangs will be examined, as well as emergent perspectives such as intersectionality.

Feminist Criminology: An Introduction

Feminist criminologies are a diverse and multifaceted approach to the study of crime and injustice that evolved from wider feminist social movements over the course of the twentieth century (Mason and Stubbs, 2012). As Renzetti

(2013: 2–3) notes, the broader feminist movement is often expressed in terms of 'waves', particularly the development of first-wave feminism which mobilised around universal suffrage and political citizenship, to the second wave of sexual liberation and gender inequality in the 1960s. These mobilisations sought to challenge embedded gender inequalities across the whole gamut of societal institutions – from politics to the media, universities to public services – exposing assumptions of male privilege and dislodging preconceived notions of womanhood. In the academic world, researchers revealed the underlying structures that normalised the experiences and opinions of often white, middle-class men, while silencing those of women, working-class and minority ethnic scholars. Attention was focused particularly on the concept of *patriarchy*, or an assumed dominance of men over women in which masculine attributes are more highly prized than those considered feminine (Renzetti, 2013). In the UK, the work of Heidensohn (1968) and Smart (1977) was instrumental in drawing attention to the ways in which criminological research systematically marginalised women's voices, and supported gendered stereotypes.

These critiques focused on the 'malestream' of criminological theory, which mainstreamed the voices and experiences of men in a way that mimicked broader patterns of sexism and patriarchy in wider society. Early theories of gender were rooted not in empirical data but rather in assumed biological differences between men and women – attributing female delinquency to biological primitivism (Lombroso and Ferrero, 1895), working-class sexuality (Thomas, 1923), or feminine cunning (Pollak, 1950). Others, relying on social and cultural explanations over the biological, emphasised the importance of 'sex-roles', namely the ways in which boys and girls are socialised into different roles in society (Parsons, 1942). In these accounts, social and cultural differences flow from *biological* differences, creating a 'twin-track' explanation for offending in which the reasons why men and women offend are constructed as fundamentally different. Explanations of crime were therefore rooted firmly in gendered stereotypes of sex-difference, rather than in a humanist social science. A central development in critiquing these approaches – not just in criminology but social sciences more generally – came in the sociological conceptualisation of *gender*. Anne Oakley, in her classic work *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972), draws attention to the difference between the category of 'sex' – which refers bluntly to 'biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function' (Oakley, 1972: 16) – and the concept of gender, which is instead a 'matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into "masculine" and "feminine"'. This conceptualisation opened a door to analysis of the perpetuation and reproduction of gendered norms in society, and the often complex relationship between sex and gender.

The analytic decoupling of sex and gender created a critical space in which to explore the different ways in which 'masculinity' and 'femininity' were normalised and constructed in society. Within the field of criminology,

for example, scholars focused on the ways in which stereotypical beliefs about women were embedded within criminal justice systems – as they were within other institutions such as schools – and the ways in which these reproduced a static and partial model of women's offending (Carlen, 1983). As Gelsthorpe and Sharpe note of young women in particular, '[the] youth justice system and related institutions since their inception [reveal] the existence of a dual image of girls, who were thought simultaneously to be more vulnerable than boys and to need a lot of care, whilst their delinquent behaviour was seen as "worse" than that of boys: offending girls were generally considered to be breaking not only the law, but also gender role expectations' (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2006: 48). As well as analysis of the institutionalisation of gendered expectations, however, attention also became focused on the contingent ways in which these values were embodied, subverted or reproduced by individuals. In a seminal article, West and Zimmerman (1987) developed the idea that gender is not innate and static, but rather is flexible and performative – in short it is something that is created and maintained through everyday interaction. This theorisation allowed for individual agency in performing, or 'doing gender', while recognising the gendered ways in which societal institutions operated.

As Renzetti documents, since second-wave feminism drew attention to the 'matrix of oppression' (2013: 10) in society, feminist criminology has become a diverse and multivocal field of enquiry. Renzetti details the development of a range of liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, black/multiracial and postmodern feminisms, each with a competing ontological frame and form of activism, yet held together by a belief that 'gender is essentially socially created and reproduced, not innately determined or immutable' (Renzetti, 2013: 7). In challenging the normative ways in which gender inequality is embedded, feminist criminologists have developed methodological strategies that radically de-hierarchise the research encounter, with research 'subjects' considered as co-participants in knowledge-production, and reciprocity and reflexivity an important epistemological building block. As Renzetti notes of this varied movement, it is less a particular approach and more 'a paradigm that studies and explains criminal offending and victimization, as well as institutional responses to these problems, as fundamentally gendered' and that emphasises the use of 'scientific knowledge' to 'alleviate oppression and contribute to more equitable social relations and social structures' (Renzetti, 2013: 13).

Today, feminist criminologies are broad and diverse, sharing a starting point that 'theories of *gender* are as much a starting point as are theories of *crime'* (Miller and Mullins, 2008: 217). Attention is trained not only on the gender-ratio of crime, gendered pathways to offending and the inter-relations between gender, crime and victimisation, but also on a range of other critical perspectives ranging from human rights (Silvestri and Crowther-Downey, 2016) to history (Davies, 1999), the global drug trade (Fleetwood, 2014) and human

trafficking (Lee, 2011). In the process, feminist approaches have come to share epistemological space with – and in some ways have contributed to – the development of a range of other critical criminological approaches that seek to give voice to perspectives that are often silenced, for example that of black and minority ethnic scholarship (Phillips and Webster, 2013). As will be explored in more detail in the sections that follow, these developments in feminist criminology have had a significant impact on the study of gangs. Before reaching this point, however, we will examine some of the statistical evidence pertaining to these issues by way of context.

Gangs, Gender and Crime: An Overview

An important starting point for analysis of the relationship between gangs, gender and crime is an examination of the relevant statistics. It is a truth long established that young people commit disproportionate levels of crime. As Hirschi and Gottfredson note, the 'age-crime curve' first discovered by Quetelet in the nineteenth century – in which offending follows a normal distribution by age – represents 'one of the brute facts of criminology' (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983: 552). As Newburn (2007: 585) reports, a fifth of cautions or convictions in a year in England and Wales will be aged 10–17, and over a third under the age of 21. Similarly, in self-report studies, more than half of males and one-third of females aged 14–25 admit to 'committing one or more criminal offences at some point in their lives', with rates of offending much closer in the teenage years. Young people are frequently also victims of crime (McAra and McVie, 2010). Within these broad patterns, there are similarly established trends relating to gender. The 'age-crime curve' peaks at different ages – 15 for males and 18 for females (Newburn, 2007) – and the so-called 'gender-gap', or difference in offending, is visible across a range of offences. As Gelsthorpe and Sharpe note, young women's offending mostly involves 'relatively minor offences, with the gender gap amongst 10–17-year-olds being smallest for theft and handling stolen goods, and assault' (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2006: 50). Young men, by contrast, are consistently more involved in the more serious and violent forms of offending and victimisation. As Messerschmidt (1997: 1) summarises, '[a]rrest, self-report, and victimization data all reflect that boys and men perpetrate more conventional crimes and the more serious of these crimes than do girls and young women'.

In relation to gangs, the Edinburgh Study reports significant numbers of young men and women claiming gang-membership; crucially, these individuals were more likely to be involved in all forms of delinquency

(Bradshaw, 2005: 201, 208–209; Smith and Bradshaw, 2005). Those individuals claiming progressively higher levels of group cohesion or organisation (via a name, sign, or territory) were found progressively more likely to engage in serious and frequent offending (Bradshaw, 2005: 210). Overall, the Edinburgh Study reports that 'rather surprisingly, girls represented the majority of any gang members and, although only slight (52.6 percent girls versus 47.4 percent of boys), the difference was statistically significant' (Bradshaw, 2005: 205). This was not constant, however. As the cohort aged, the proportion of females dropped significantly – at 13, 18% self-defined as gang members (18.8% of males; 21.5% of females); at age 16, 12% claimed membership (15.6% males; 10.8% females); and at 17, the figure dropped to 5% (8.0% males; 3.5% females) (Smith and Bradshaw, 2005: 9–11). A Home Office publication (Sharp et al., 2006), based on the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS), based on a household survey of 10- to 19-year-olds in England and Wales, found similarly that an estimated 6% of males and females were associated with what the authors defined as a 'delinquent youth group'. Those associated with membership were considerably more likely to report offending (Sharp et al., 2006: 7). Members were also more likely to have committed a serious offence, or be frequent offenders (34% and 28% for members respectively; 13% and 7% for non-members), as well as more likely to use illegal drugs (45% in the last year, compared to 15%) and alcohol (28% compared to 11%) (Sharp et al., 2006: 7). In a finding similar to the Edinburgh Study, the OCJS found that the average age of female membership (14–15) was lower than that of males (14–17) (Sharp et al., 2006: 3).

Beyond these statistical correlations between gangs, gender and crime, other scholars have highlighted the importance of the relationships between youth crime, gangs and other forms of social differentiation and exclusion. Successive longitudinal studies demonstrate that persistent serious offending is associated with marginalisation (McAra and McVie, 2010), and that gang-membership is strongly correlated with living in communities experiencing embedded social and economic disadvantage (Smith and Bradshaw, 2005). McAra and McVie (2010), reviewing 10 years of fieldwork, highlight that persistent serious offending tends to be associated with experiences of victimisation and social adversity, and that violent youth offenders are more likely to engage in other harmful or risky behaviour such as self-harm, drug use and regular alcohol consumption and – for girls in particular – to come from a socially deprived background (McAra and McVie, 2010: 187). In the US literature, similar correlations have been drawn between neighbourhood and gang-association, with correlations between risk-factors such as school exclusion and engagement in other risky behaviours and gang-membership (Thornberry et al., 2003: 57). These findings suggest that links between structural exclusion and social trauma in youth crime broadly may also be borne out for young people involved in gangs.

Qualitative studies indicate that gang members are more likely to have experienced a troubled or traumatic family background. As Miller (2001b) notes, 'the gang assists [both] young women and men in coping with their lives in chaotic, violent and economically marginalised communities' (Miller, 2001b: 118). As well as acting as a refuge, however, gang involvement also brings risk – membership increases both the frequency and seriousness of offending, with men disproportionately responsible for the more serious and violent forms of offending. Moreover, evidence suggests that street culture intensifies, rather than diminishes, forms of gendered exclusion (Maher, 1997). As such, women involved in gangs balance a 'sense of belonging and support, status and identity, along with recreation and excitement' (Miller, 2001b: 123). In the UK, the Youth Justice Board's report *Groups, Gangs and Weapons* (Young et al., 2007) came to a broadly similar conclusion. Based on interviews with youth justice practitioners and young people with gang involvement, the report sought to mark out distinctions between group offending and gang behaviour – for both, this was focused 'on the intensity and seriousness of their offending behaviour' (Young et al., 2007 7), and principally involved young adults, as opposed to under-18s. In terms of the gender dynamics of group offending, the report found contrasting views of female participation. While 'some were in female-only groups, others were in mixed groups', and 'most of these young women saw themselves as autonomous and independent females, despite their frequently adverse circumstances' (Young et al., 2007: 12).

Further, scholars have drawn attention to the experience of racialised inequality, gang membership and crime. As Phillips and Webster (2013) note, black and minority ethnic youth – in both the United States and UK – tend to be vastly over-represented in stop-and-search, police crime and prison statistics. As data from the Youth Lifestyles Survey (Newburn, 2007) have suggested, this results not from differences in offending, but differences in policing practices: 'in general, white and African-Caribbean youth have similar rates of participation in offending … more sizeable differences [appear] to be in relation to treatment within the criminal justice system which, in some instances at least, was "consistent with discriminatory treatment"' (Newburn, 2007: 590). These disparities are particularly pronounced for young black women, as Gelsthorpe and Sharpe note, 'African-Caribbean, and, in particular "black other" girls, especially those aged 14 and 15, are up to six times more likely to be prosecuted than similarly placed white females' (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2006: 52). These statistical trends suggest the need for a critical approach to the study of gangs and gender. In the following section, some of the key contributions to the feminist literature on gangs will be reviewed.

Feminist Approaches to Gangs

Mirroring the 'malestream' in criminology more broadly, historically gangs were viewed, and researched, as an exclusively male phenomenon. Latterly, public attention towards the 'new violent female gang member' (Miller and Decker, 2001: 123) has coincided with a growing body of female gang scholarship, which concentrates on women's participation in gangs, as opposed to that of male gang members or researchers, 'who describe the female experience from … their own viewpoint … [and] have characterized female members as maladjusted tomboys or sexual chattel who, in either case, are no more than mere appendages to the male members of the gang' (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004: 44). Chesney-Lind and Hagedorn, reprinting classic essays on women's involvement in gangs, find only one written by a woman in the period 1927–1977 – an important essay by Laura Fishman where she 'worries about the fact that she was the only African American woman among her entire group of researchers' (Chesney-Lind and Hagedorn, 1999: 6). Though this disparity has been addressed in more recent history, it remains unclear whether claims of increasing female participation represent a real increase, or an increase in attention, or indeed simply better research (Miller, 2001b: 116–117). Regardless, as Miller summarises, 'we have very good data today indicating that young women are participating in gangs in numbers large enough to cause concern' (Miller, 2001b: 117).

Early feminist research on young women, gangs and crime sought to interrogate the so-called 'liberation hypothesis' of female offending. In this account (Adler, 1975), the hard-won freedoms of the feminist movements of the 1960s had resulted in greater autonomy and independence for young women, resulting in increased offending – a phenomenon Adler (1975) described as 'sisters in crime'. Anne Campbell's *The Girls in the Gang* (1984), based on interviews and observations with young gang-associated women in three New York gangs, found this hypothesis to be unhelpful and limiting. While Campbell found that young women in gangs formed close social bonds, apart from their relationships with young men, these were fostered in part due to a heavily patriarchal, sexist street culture. The three groups studied (Sex Girls, Sandman Ladies and Five-Percent Nation) were ethnically heterogeneous and involved different forms of gender-balance. For example, the Five-Percent Nation was an all-female, African-American gang with a political and cultural ideology, while the Sandman Ladies involved a mixture of Hispanic and African American ethnicities. Across all groups, however, a complex tapestry of toughness, resistance, marginalisation and gender-dynamics played out that complicated simplistic images of the 'liberated female'. According to Campbell (1984), the

factors that pushed young women towards gang association were experiences of 'meaningless domestic labor', alongside subordination in both the home and in a class-based society, as well as social isolation.

Joan Moore's classic *Going Down to the Barrio* (1991) presented a similarly complicating image of young women and gangs. Tracing large-scale social and structural shifts in the Chicano 'barrios' of East Los Angeles from the 1940s to the 1970s, Moore documents the impact of these changes on street culture and gang-involvement among both young men and women. A few years later, Lisa Maher's *Sexed Work* (1997), though not explicitly about gangs, did much to set the tone for contemporary feminist approaches to street crime and street culture. Maher's sophisticated ethnographic study of female street drug-users in New York City details the individual and collective strategies used by women in navigating the streets. Critiquing prior research on the street drug trade as an 'equal opportunity employer' that offers a subcultural compensation for young excluded men, Maher presents a powerful counter-narrative of women's experience of street culture. Rather than a compensatory culture that is freed from patriarchal relations, Maher argues that street culture amplifies and magnifies the gendered structures of wider society. While street culture may represent an 'adaptive response to the exigencies of life on the margins' (Maher, 1997: 53), it is not compensatory but exacerbatory for women (Maher, 1997: 19). As Maher argues, 'it serves to reproduce the gender and racial inequalities which burden poor women, and poor minority women in particular' (Maher, 1997: 82). Social relations between participants were dense, woman-centred, and not dominated by men – much like Campbell's – and revolved around social support, drug-sharing, kinship and childcare. These relations, nonetheless, were mediated by relational differences of race and ethnicity, as well as navigating the patriarchal street culture of male drug-dealers and users.

Maher's arguments set a critical foundation for one of the most important feminist contributions to the gang literature in recent years, Jody Miller's *One of the Guys* (2001a). Miller's text is a book-length analysis of both gang and 'non-gang' involved women in two US cities. The study combines both qualitative and quantitative methods, and careful analysis of interview data, making a case for a sophisticated relational theory of gendered actions and structural exclusion. Miller notes commonalities among young women involved in gangs in terms of neighbourhood and friendship networks, problems with family, and influence of gang-involved family members. For Miller, within the hyper-masculine structure of the gang, young women 'performed' gender by creating spaces for individual agency that negotiated femininity and respect while protecting themselves from risk. Young men were more likely to carry out riskier activities such as use of guns or drug-sales (Miller and Decker, 2001). Miller characterised this balance of risk and gendered performance as a 'patriarchal bargain' – 'putting up' with a high degree of sexual risk by known fellow

gang members, in implicit exchange for protection from unknown individuals. In contrast with Campbell and Adler, Miller points to a lack of 'sisterhood' – attitudes to other women were those of suspicion and blame. As Miller notes, these gendered social spaces represent both an accretion of cultural exclusion and an active effort to negotiate and subvert those exclusions:

> Recognizing the devaluation of women around them, young women appreciated the normative aspects of 'equality' available in gangs, even when it was not always a reality. Identifying with dominant beliefs about women while rejecting such images for themselves allowed many young women to construct themselves as 'one of the guys.' Being one of the guys, as Kanter notes, sometimes meant doing so at the expense of 'the girls'. (Miller, 2001a: 197–198)

In many ways, Miller's study marked a watershed moment in feminist approaches to gangs. The box-text below reflects on a key development in the debate that occurred in the aftermath of the publication of Miller's book, between the author and another scholar of gangs, gender and criminological theory, James Messerschmidt.

MILLER VS MESSERSCHMIDT: 'BAD-GIRL FEMININITY' OR 'ONE OF THE GUYS'?

In 2002, an important debate took place in the pages of the journal *Theoretical Criminology*, which speaks directly to contemporary debates surrounding gangs, gender and criminological theory (Messerschmidt, 2002; Miller, 2002). Jody Miller had recently published the book *One of the Guys* (2001a), which engaged with the work of James Messerschmidt in his book *Crime as Structured Action* (1997), discussed below. Where Messerschmidt sought to develop a general framework through which to understand the relationship between gender, class, ethnicity and crime – arguing that criminal behaviour could be best theorised as a structured response to multiple forms of marginalisation – Miller's task was focused more specifically on explaining young women's involvement in gangs. The debate hinged, crucially, on different readings of West and Zimmerman's notion of 'doing gender'. For Miller, young women in the hyper-masculine environment of her study adopted a persona that was best described as masculinity – being 'one of the guys' – while Messerschmidt held that this behaviour is better characterised as a form of femininity, specifically 'bad-girl femininity'. For Messerschmidt, this approach is more in tune with 'third-wave' punk feminism – which 'grew not out of girls wanting sensitive boys so much as girls wanting to be tough girls'. The question is important: do female gang members act like guys or like girls in 'doing' gangs? As Miller (2002: 443) notes:

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> Clearly, part of what young women were doing was constructing an identity in opposition to other normative constructs of femininity. But they were 'crossing' gender to do so. ... These girls' accounts do not simply reflect the construction of a 'bad-girl' femininity that is differentiated from other femininities; instead, they reflect gender crossing, embracing a masculine identity that they view as contradicting their bodily sex category (that is, female).

Read the debates and response, and consider the following questions:

1   In what ways do Miller and Messerschmidt's approaches overlap, and how do they differ?
2   To what extent are these positions relevant in relation to contemporary debates?
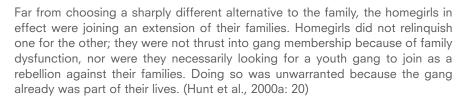3   What is the significance of this debate for the development of feminist approaches to gangs?

Miller's study has been followed by a range of feminist studies of young women, gangs and street culture that develop from this sophisticated theoretical and empirical perspective. In Nurge's (2003) study of female gangs in the United States, for example, a similar experience of prior trauma and victimisation was in evidence: 50% of gang-involved women had run away from home, and several had permanently left home at a young age, with abuse cited as a common motivating factor (Nurge, 2003: 168). Despite these commonalities, gangs were found to play a range of roles in the lives of young women, and represented a similarly complex environment to exist within. Nurge argues that the experience was 'liberating yet limiting', involving a degree of freedom but one, like Miller, that was traded for a degree of risk: '[m]any females joined a gang to empower themselves – whether to escape an abusive situation, protect oneself in other ways, or make money – and were successful in doing so, at least temporarily' (Nurge, 2003: 177).

In a sequence of publications emanating from a large-scale interview project on gang-membership in San Francisco, Hunt, Joe-Laidler and colleagues have explored a range of tensions and complexities in young women's gang involvement. Hunt et al. (2000a) problematise and complicate assumptions that female gang members join gangs as an alternative 'family' – seeking refuge from a chaotic, violent home life. The authors argue, on the contrary, that the gang and the family are far more closely interwoven than this stereotype would imply: many family members are gang members, and many have strong ties to both family and gang. Thus, they argue:

> Far from choosing a sharply different alternative to the family, the homegirls in effect were joining an extension of their families. Homegirls did not relinquish one for the other; they were not thrust into gang membership because of family dysfunction, nor were they necessarily looking for a youth gang to join as a rebellion against their families. Doing so was unwarranted because the gang already was part of their lives. (Hunt et al., 2000a: 20)

Elsewhere, the study reflects on 'situations of violence' (Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001), pregnancy and motherhood (Hunt et al., 2005), performance of gender identity (Joe-Laidler and Hunt, 2001), and partying, drug use and alcohol (Hunt et al., 2000b) in the lives of women involved in gangs. Across these various domains, the authors find complexity, difference and the amplification of 'mainstream' gender norms, with young women acting 'sometimes as offenders (or more precisely as defenders of their honor and reputations and personal safety), but also as victims living in a tension-filled, sometimes hostile, environment' (Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001: 382). For example, the 'sexual double standard' in which men are lauded for having multiple sexual partners, while women are similarly chastised for the same behaviour, was in evidence for participants: '[o]n one side of the line, the women could party and have fun and maintain respect, on the other side, if they became too drunk and behaved in an uncontrolled way, especially it was judged as sexually promiscuous, then they lost respect' (Hunt et al., 2000b: 348). 'Doing gender', or 'being female', in the gang environment is therefore both source and resource for attracting or deflecting potential harm. The techniques and strategies employed by women in this environment illustrate the subtle and individuated methods through which status, and self-esteem, are upheld under such conditions.

Beyond these studies, several other recent contributions – in both the US and UK – have stressed the need to move 'beyond the gang' in the framing of young women's involvement in street culture and violence. Ness (2010), following Anderson's (1999) 'code of the street' thesis, argues that street fights are the norm rather than unusual, but that gender and violence are performed differently. Her study therefore traced 'how girls within a shared social and cultural context differentially perform violence' (Ness, 2010: 17): some for sport, others for reputation and identity. A developing literature in the UK (Young et al., 2007; Batchelor, 2009), building on themes and findings from the US, challenges these views, emphasising the complex interweaving of gender identity alongside age and class in the construction of femininities: 'In short, such research acknowledges that subordination and agency are simultaneously realized in young women's lives, and thereby demonstrates that there is no such thing as the essential "gang girl"' (Batchelor, 2009: 408; see also Burman et al., 2001). Elsewhere, new scholarship has focused on the dynamics of gender among women drug-dealers in Norway (Grundetjern and Sandberg, 2012), 'negotiated femininity' and 'code-switching' among young

women involved in street culture in South Africa (Lindegaard et al., 2013), and the relationship between migrant exclusion, gender and gang-affiliation in Belgium (van Hellemont, 2015).

These contributions create a powerful case for the inclusion of sociological perspectives on gender. Such an approach 'allows for recognition that there are multiple masculinities and femininities, shaped by structural positioning' (Miller, 2002: 438), emphasising the contingent and intersectional nature of structured agency (Miller, 2001a). In developing a nuanced approach to gangs and gender, therefore, it is important to engage with the concepts of both masculinity and femininity.

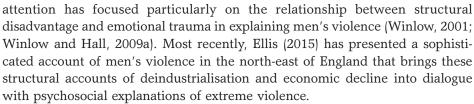## Gangs, Masculinities and Structured Action

One of the many significant contributions of feminist criminology has been the problematising of static notions of gender, and a recognition of the structuring role of gender inequality across a range of domains and institutions. While a focus on women's experiences of crime and justice has formed a critical foundation in challenging masculinist assumptions, latterly a connected body of work has developed that emphasises the importance of gender and gender-relations for men and boys. As Messerschmidt (1997: 1) observes, gender is 'the strongest predictor of criminal involvement – it is boys and men who dominate in crime', and a sophisticated conceptualisation of gender offers an important optic through which to understand this fundamental inequality. As such, a gendered criminology necessitates a recognition of the ways in which both masculinities *and* femininities are performed in the context of crime and justice. Developing a theory of crime as 'structured action' (1997, 2014), Messerschmidt seeks to concatenate the various structural dimensions of social life – class, 'race', age, ethnicity – and situate criminal behaviour as an agentic response to an individual's position within these structures. For Messerschmidt, gender is performed under specific historical and social conditions that vary across time and space (Messerschmidt, 1997). In contemporary Western societies, the 'hegemonic', or ideologically dominant, masculinity revolves around 'whiteness (race), work in the paid labor market (gender division of labor), the subordination of girls and young women (gender relations of power), professional-managerial (class) and heterosexism (sexuality)' (Messerschmidt, 1997: 10). Crime is therefore structured by an individual's position within these structural contexts, as well as the *dis*position that has developed in relation to it.

Messerschmidt's theory of crime as 'structured action', alongside the work of Raewyn Connell (2002) on gender and masculinities, has been very influential in criminology (see Hall, 2002; Jefferson, 2002 for critiques). In the UK,

attention has focused particularly on the relationship between structural disadvantage and emotional trauma in explaining men's violence (Winlow, 2001; Winlow and Hall, 2009a). Most recently, Ellis (2015) has presented a sophisticated account of men's violence in the north-east of England that brings these structural accounts of deindustrialisation and economic decline into dialogue with psychosocial explanations of extreme violence.

In the field of gang research, feminist perspectives have similarly demonstrated the narrowness of traditional approaches to gangs, and the necessity of researching gangs in a way that recognises the methodological and theoretical complexities of gender. These developments have not only led to an increasingly robust evidence-base in relation to young women and gangs, but – importantly – also to a growing recognition of the complex relationship between gangs and masculinities (Mullins, 2006). Rather than a blinkered assumption that men's experience constituted the entirety of the empirical foundation of gangs, increasingly researchers are examining the complex ways in which masculinity is 'performed' in relation to gangs, and the relationship between these localised performances and broader structures of class, gender and patriarchy that exist in society (Baird, 2011). Feminist perspectives on gangs therefore do not focus solely on women, but rather on gender relations and gender dynamics, and their particular composition within the gang context. As Hagedorn observes, '[t]he treatment of gender in male gang research is a good example of academic benign neglect' (1998: 153).

In exploring the intersections of gangs and masculinities, an important starting point is the idea of gang identification as a form of compensatory masculinity. As Bourgois (1995) has argued, structural obstacles to traditional 'bread-winner' models of masculinity are implicated in the creation of a violent street masculinity as a form of symbolic compensation. As Bourgois describes, men who are unable 'to provide economically for their conjugal unit' compensate by asserting a 'domineering control over their wives and children (Bourgois, 1995: 413). For Alexander, writing in a UK context, gang identities may be conceived of as a defensive means of attaining masculine distinction in contexts where traditional routes to masculinity are blocked (Alexander, 2000). In a similar way, Connell suggests that violence is often a means of asserting masculinity in the face of other forms of marginalisation: 'youth gang violence of inner-city streets is a striking example of the assertion of marginalized masculinities against other men, continuous with the assertion of masculinity in sexual violence against women' (Connell, 2005: 83). For Maher (1997), however, accounts of street culture that stress this compensatory function are problematic insofar as they fail to adequately recognise the complexities and consequences of a masculine street culture for young women. As will be explored in the next section, while violence and respect may be thought of as a compensation for otherwise marginalised masculinities, this serves to obscure – and arguably legitimate – the amplification of gendered violence and sexual victimisation that is often associated with street culture.

Notably, several recent studies have similarly drawn connections between the gendered norms within gang contexts and those elsewhere. Venkatesh (2003) argues that US fraternities fulfil most legal definitions of a gang, yet have never been treated as such when charged with collective offences. Similarly, Miller and Brunson (2000) have analysed the impact of different gender compositions in gangs on group dynamics, comparing and contrasting with other youth associations, while Hagedorn points to the similarities between gang masculinities and those found in other male-dominated environments. Hagedorn's typology of gang masculinities – 'Frat Boys, Bossmen, Studs and Gentlemen' – explicitly relates the construction of masculinity for young gang members to mainstream masculinities (Hagedorn, 1998). While drawing attention to the specificities of gendered relations within gang contexts, these studies demonstrate that these models of masculinity are neither unique nor part of a pathological 'hyper-masculinity'.

Summarising and updating the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity', Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have stressed that masculinities must be conceived of not only as structural but also as scalar. Like the multi-level model of social harm elaborated in Chapter 5, while broad patterns of gendered inequality may be discernible at a global level, these vary significantly according to local and national contexts; and, reflecting Connell's more recent work (2007), between global North and South. As Baird (2011) and Streicher (2011), writing respectively in Colombia and East Timor document, the relationship between structural marginalisation and masculine street cultures is comparable in some respects to those described by scholars in the United States and Europe. As Baird notes, '[l]icit opportunities to secure desired, or dignified, livelihoods are scarce, leading to many "frustrated dreams". … A number of youths then search for other options through crime and gangs' (Baird, 2011: 33). Nonetheless, as Streicher argues, the localised forms of gender and masculinity must also be understood within the unique historical and cultural context in which they emerged. As she notes of East Timor, 'adolescence is not necessarily marked by "storm and stress", since "youth" in many societies have to take on adult responsibilities at a very young age' (Streicher, 2011: 19), and draws attention to the legacies of colonialism in shaping patterns of masculine roles.

Finally, it is worth noting that recent scholarship has also emphasised the relationships between gangs, masculinities and 'desistance' from crime (Baird, 2011; Brenneman, 2012; Flores, 2014). Flores' work in Los Angeles, for example, traces the ways in which local faith-based ministries work to provide alternative models of masculinity for gang-involved youth. While gangs may 'compensate for the absence of stable employment' and allow Chicano 'men to symbolically create and access alternative expressions of masculine dominance' (Flores, 2014: 4) in a similar way to other studies, for Flores there is a possibility of the construction of a 'reformed barrio masculinity' that draws on 'spiritual practice and new definitions of masculinity … to make the shift from

gang activity to domestic life' (Flores, 2014: 2). Importantly, this work draws attention to the pains of maintaining a masculine self-image, with crying seen as a source of shame (Brenneman, 2012) and intrinsic difficulties in renegotiating a macho self-image in exiting gang environments (Flores, 2014: 199). This work is a good example of new theoretical and empirical work on gangs, structured action and masculinities that demonstrates a clear progression from the 'malestream' gang criminology of the past. In the final section, some of the emerging and future directions for the field will be summarised.

Gangs and Gender: Emerging Perspectives

Feminist approaches to crime and injustice are constantly evolving, and gendered understandings of gangs have broadly developed in step and dialogue with these broader debates. Recent scholarship has involved an increasingly sophisticated analysis of 'doing' femininity and masculinity in different contexts, as well as analysis of the persistence of patriarchy in new environments, notably the Internet and social media. In the process, feminist approaches have also connected and formed common cause with a range of other critical perspectives that seek to give voice to perspectives that are often silenced, particularly black and minority ethnic scholarship (Phillips and Webster, 2013), postcolonial perspectives (Cunneen, 2011) and Southern theory (Carrington et al., 2016). In this final section, the relevance and applicability of these new and emergent perspectives as they relate to gangs and gender will be examined.

First, researchers have increasingly sought to move beyond the separate study of 'male' and 'female' experiences of gangs – and, correspondingly, of the separate meanings of masculinity and femininity – but rather to examine the gender-dynamics that exist in a *relational* context. Miller and Brunson (2000), for example, seek to draw parallels between the role of gender-*proportions* in groups as an influence on activity. In line with studies of gender in other group contexts such as fraternities or high-school sports, the proportion of different people in a group shape the interactional context. Thus, in a gang context, the gender-proportions will influence the roles, attitudes and behaviours of the group in relation to one another. As group norms are extremely powerful, drowning out 'individual beliefs about right and wrong' (Miller and Brunson, 2000: 421), so 'group processes in gangs shape normative constructions of gender and thus influence the gender dynamics of these groups' (Miller and Brunson, 2000: 422). In Miller and Brunson's study, for example, those who classified their gang as male-only 'were adamant that gangs, by their nature, were masculine groups' (Miller and Brunson, 2000: 431), and viewed themselves within

rigid gender-norms. Within more mixed groups, however, these boundaries were less pronounced (Miller and Brunson, 2000: 434).

Second, scholars have increasingly sought to combine feminist perspectives on gangs with critical scholarship on issues of race and ethnicity. Building on Messerschmidt's theory of structured action, researchers have sought to reposition analysis to privilege the voices and experiences of black and minority ethnic communities. Drawing on critical race theory, for example, Wing and Willis (2009: 4) argue for 'conscious consideration of the intersection of race, class, and gender by placing women of color at the center of the analysis ... [to reveal] the discriminatory and oppressive nature of their reality'. Jody Miller's more recent work, *Getting Played* (2008), for example, draws on an intersectional approach to explore the experiences of victimisation and gendered violence in the lives of poor young African American girls. Miller argues that processes of urban inequality, racialised urban poverty and cultural adaptations 'heighten and shape the tremendous gender-based violence faced by urban African American girls' (2008: 3), creating an environment in which severe sexual and violent victimisation is an everyday experience. The gendered discourses of both young men and women in the community reproduced gendered stereotypes and individual pathologies of young women extant in wider society but – like Maher's study 10 years previously – in an amplified and concentrated way. Rather than framing the relationship between gangs and masculinities as *compensatory*, therefore, feminist scholars argue that it should be viewed as *amplificatory* – intensifying and magnifying patriarchal social relations that are visible elsewhere in society (Young and Trickett, 2017).

Third, in line with broader movements in feminist scholarship, discussions of sexuality are becoming increasingly integrated into gang research. In the new edition of Messerschmidt's *Crime as Structured Action* (2014), the concept of sex and sexuality are introduced. Reviewing key contributions from the literature on gender and masculinity in recent years, Messerschmidt draws attention to the role of sexualities in constructing hegemonic and 'punk' versions of masculinity. Developing the theory in light of both these developments and those in wider society, Messerschmidt 'emphasizes the construction of sex, gender, and sexuality as situated social, interactional and embodied accomplishments' (Messerschmidt, 2014: 22). Within the field of gang research specifically, 'doing sexuality' has similarly started to become part of the conversation on gangs and gender (Panfil, 2014), making connections between queer criminology and gang research. In a recent review of the literature on gangs, gender and sexuality, Panfil and Peterson (2015) draw attention not only to the role of gender-composition and victimisation, but also to the position of gay gang members, and gender fluidity within the gang environment. The authors underscore the necessity of understanding gender, sex and sexuality in

relational and contingent ways, emphasising 'questioning binaries and other hegemonic categories' (Panfil and Peterson, 2015: 227).

Fourth, feminist scholarship on gangs has increasingly sought out global, comparative and transnational perspectives with which to explore local, national and international differences in the relationship between gangs and gender. Drawing on Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) work on the scalar nature of gender, scholars have drawn attention to the connections between globalised inequality, patterns of migration and local cultures of street-based resistance. Brotherton, for example, in his transnational study of the 'Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation' (ALKQN) in New York, Quito and Barcelona (Brotherton and Salazar-Atias, 2003; Brotherton and Barrios, 2004; Brotherton, 2007), draws attention to the glocalised politics of young women involved in the ALKQN. For young women in the study, identification was utilised to 'symbolically subvert and/or invert their marginalized sociocultural status' (Brotherton and Salazar-Atias, 2003: 186) with young women in particular 'looking for excitement, opportunity, responsibility, and status' (Brotherton and Salazar-Atias, 2003: 188). The ALKQN sought to create space for female empowerment (Americanism), while retaining focus on the traditional gender role (Latinism/'Marianismo'). Though *some* members sought out the gang, or were sought by the gang, to escape abuse, familial problems, or domestic issues, others had a more mutually supportive relationship between both family and group. Indeed, many sought out the gang as they were 'looking for politics' – that is, in search of a group that could codify and represent their activist sentiments. For the women in the study, the group represented a crucial emotional, economic and social resource to combat disenfranchisement. As the authors conclude:

> the ALKQN functioned for these women as the only grassroots movement that: was sufficiently indigenous that it could be trusted by the most marginalized of urban females; could or would address their multiple needs at critical junctures in their life course; and offered the opportunities for emotional, spiritual, social, and political growth that few other organizations have dared to imagine. (Brotherton and Salazar-Atias, 2003: 205–206)

Fifth and finally, perspectives such as those offered by Brotherton point to a final new perspective in feminist approaches to gangs – a movement that might be called 'beyond the gang'. Rather than characterising young women's involvement in street violence purely through the lens of the gang, a number of researchers have sought to explore the broader role of everyday violence and victimisation in the lives of young women (Burman et al., 2001; Batchelor, 2009). As Cobbina et al. (2010) argue, while scholarly accounts of young men's violence tend to emphasise themes of autonomy, respect and the defence of reputation in the context of street masculinity, women's violence

has tended to be constructed differently. On the contrary, Cobbina et al. suggest that young women use violence more often than commonly believed, and their violence is likewise tied to concerns about status and respect – though the narratives of women's violence employed by young men clearly replicated mainstream narratives. As the authors argue, 'not only were "gang fights" seen as more significant than "cat fights," but only males' use of violence was considered legitimate and thus real' (Cobbina et al., 2010: 620). Similarly, Batchelor (2011), Young (2011) and Carrington (2013) argue for the need to focus on the broader institutional and mediated construction and regulation of young women – with 'the gang' another means through which to criminalise girls' behaviours. Carrington (2013: 11) calls instead for 'a sophisticated theory of female violence that considers the context, the politics, the power relations, the gender dynamics, and the intersectionality of specific instances of female violence'.

Summary

This chapter has examined feminist perspectives on gangs, gender and crime in a number of ways. The first section introduced feminist approaches to criminology, and the relationship between feminist criminology and the broader feminist movement. Key distinctions between sex and gender, and central concepts such as patriarchy and 'doing gender' were presented. Connections with other critical approaches to crime, particularly those relating to 'race', ethnicity and colonialism, were also covered. The subsequent section covered statistical data relating to the relationships between gangs and crime, on the one hand, and age, gender and ethnicity, on the other. Intersections between these variables were noted, suggesting the need for theories of crime that were sensitive to the structured nature of social life. Following on from this, the third section examined feminist approaches to gangs in some detail, picking up themes of victimisation, trauma and the 'patriarchal bargain' introduced in earlier sections. Covering classic studies alongside more contemporary contributions, the section traced the development of feminist perspectives and their impact on the field. One impact – though by no means the only one – has been the broader incorporation of the concept of gender into understandings of gangs. The fourth section explored research in this area in some detail, incorporating discussion of the theory of 'structured action' as well as work on gangs and masculinities that draws on feminist epistemologies. The final section documented new and emergent themes in the study of gangs and gender, with particular focus on issues of sexuality and critical global scholarship.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Many of the previous theories of youth gangs were based on male researchers carrying out data collection with male participants. What problems can you see with this approach?

2. Researchers argue that gender is an important way of understanding power in society. Think about the institutions that you have experience of – school, universities, workplaces, clubs. What are the gender differences within these contexts, and what explains them?

3. James Messerschmidt's theory of 'structured action' argues that we must think of age, gender, class and other variables in a relational context – as 'structures' that constrain our behaviour, including crime. Can you think of any ways that *your* behaviour is structured in this way?

FURTHER READING

For an overview of feminism and social science from a US perspective, see Renzetti (2013). For major contributions on feminism, crime and justice in the UK, see Heidensohn (1968), Smart (1977), Gelsthorpe and Morris (1988) and Carlen (1983). For an overview of the intersections between feminism and criminology, see Naffine (1997). On feminist approaches to gangs, see Chesney-Lind and Hagedorn (1999) for a collection of important contributions, and Campbell (1984), Moore (1991), Maher (1997) and Miller (2001a). On gangs, crime and structured action, see Messerschmidt (1997), Hagedorn (1998), Mullins (2006) and Flores (2014). For interesting recent work on gangs and gender in the US and UK, see Cobbina et al. (2010) and Young and Trickett (2017). On gangs and sexuality, see Panfil and Peterson (2015).