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# Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Crime

## Future Directions for Feminist Criminology

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More than 30 years after the first scholarship of its kind was produced, feminist studies of crime are more commonplace than ever before. Two recent milestone events—the 20th anniversary of the American Society of Criminology’s Division on Women and Crime and the creation of this journal, the official publication of the division—provide the perfect opportunity to reflect on what lies ahead for feminist criminology. In this article, the author argues that the future of feminist criminology lies in our willingness to embrace a theoretical framework that recognizes multiple, intersecting inequalities. Specifically, the author maintains that to advance an understanding of gender, crime, and justice that achieves universal relevance and is free from the shortcomings of past ways of thinking, feminist criminologists must examine linkages between inequality and crime using an intersectional theoretical framework that is informed by multiracial feminism.

**Keywords:** *feminist criminology; intersections of race, class, and gender*

Feminist criminology has survived the growing pains of its development during the 1970s to emerge as a mature theoretical orientation. Thanks to the pioneering generation of feminist criminologists who insisted that women’s deviance was worthy of academic inquiry, as well as to the contemporary generation of feminist criminologists who have contributed immensely to our understanding of women as victims, offenders, and practitioners of the criminal justice system, feminist criminology now is routinely recognized by the broader discipline as a legitimate theoretical perspective (or more accurately, set of perspectives). More than 30 years after the first scholarship of its kind was produced, feminist studies of crime are more commonplace than ever before.

Two recent milestone events remind us of just how powerful an influence feminists have had in criminology during the past three decades. First, 2004 marked the 20th

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anniversary of the Division on Women and Crime, the unit of the American Society of Criminology whose members are dedicated to feminist criminology and to the study of issues related to women, gender, and crime. Second, the creation of this journal, the official publication of the Division on Women and Crime, serves as a testament to the demand that exists for feminist criminological scholarship. Together, these two important achievements provide the perfect opportunity to reflect on what lies ahead for feminist criminology. Now is the time to ask ourselves, In what direction is contemporary feminism heading, and how will developments in the broader feminist movement influence the future of feminist criminology in particular? How will the work of feminist criminologists be defined in the 21st century, and what opportunities exist for the advancement of feminist criminology in the coming years?

Throughout this article, I argue that the future of feminist criminology lies in our willingness to embrace a theoretical framework that recognizes multiple, intersecting inequalities. Contemporary feminist criminologists bear the responsibility of advancing an inclusive feminism, one that simultaneously attends to issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, religion, physical ability, and other locations of inequality as they relate to crime and deviance. Put simply, to advance an understanding of gender, crime, and justice that achieves universal relevance and is free from the shortcomings of past ways of thinking, feminist criminologists must examine linkages between inequality and crime using an intersectional theoretical framework that is informed by multiracial feminism.

To present a persuasive argument for using an intersectional approach in feminist studies of crime, I have divided this article into four sections. First, I start by tracing the development of feminist criminology from its inception in the early 1970s. This section begins with a brief discussion of various feminist perspectives and then outlines the development of feminist criminology within the context of the broader feminist movement. Second, I describe the evolution of feminist approaches to gender that occurred during second-wave feminism of the 1970s and 1980s. Specifically, this section considers the transition from “sameness” and “difference” models, which are informed by liberal feminism, to a “dominance” model informed by radical feminism. Third, I discuss the emergence during contemporary third-wave feminism of an alternative approach to gender: an intersectional model informed by multiracial feminism. Fourth, I underscore the importance of this intersectional model for feminist criminology by highlighting its theoretical, methodological, and praxis-related relevance, and I suggest future directions for feminist criminology with respect to intersections of race, class, gender, and crime.

## **Feminist Perspectives and the Development of Feminist Criminology**

### **Overview of Feminist Perspectives**

Before summarizing the development of feminist criminology, it is first necessary to point out that *feminism* does not refer to a unitary theory. Rather, there are multiple

perspectives that fall under the rubric of *feminism*, each of which involves different assumptions about the source of gender inequality and women's oppression (Barak, Flavin, & Leighton, 2001; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Price & Sokoloff, 2004). Accordingly, feminist theory traditionally is divided into five major perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

First, *liberal feminism* regards gender role socialization as the primary source of women's oppression. In other words, men's social roles (e.g., competitive and aggressive) are afforded more social status and power than women's roles (e.g., nurturing and passive). Consequently, liberal feminists emphasize political, social, legal, and economic equality between women and men. Within criminology, liberal feminists view women's offending as a function of gender role socialization as well; that is, women offend at a lower rate than men because their socialization provides them with fewer opportunities to engage in deviance.

Second, *radical feminism* identifies patriarchy, or male dominance, as the root cause of women's oppression. In other words, women experience discrimination because social relations and social interactions are shaped by male power and privilege. Within criminology, radical feminists often focus on manifestations of patriarchy in crimes against women, such as domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, and pornography, and recognize that women's offending often is preceded by victimization, typically at the hands of men.<sup>2</sup>

Third, *Marxist feminism* attributes women's oppression to their subordinate class status within capitalist societies. In other words, the capitalist mode of production shapes class and gender relations that ultimately disadvantage women because women occupy the working class instead of the ruling class. Within criminology, Marxist feminists theorize that women's subordinate class status may compel them to commit crime as a means of supporting themselves economically.

Fourth, *socialist feminism* combines radical and Marxist perspectives to conclude that women's oppression results from concomitant sex- and class-based inequalities. In other words, class and gender work in tandem to structure society, and socialist feminists call for an examination of the ways in which gender relations are shaped by class and vice versa. Within criminology, socialist feminists examine causes of crime within the context of interacting gender- and class-based systems of power.

Fifth, *postmodern feminism* departs from the other feminist perspectives by questioning the existence of any one "truth," including women's oppression. In other words, postmodern feminists reject fixed categories and universal concepts in favor of multiple truths, and as such examine the effects of discourse and symbolic representation on claims about knowledge. Within criminology, postmodern feminists interrogate the social construction of concepts such as "crime," "justice," and "deviance" and challenge accepted criminological truths.

Although these are the five most commonly identified feminist perspectives, other perspectives are equally important to feminist theory. *Black feminism* and *critical race feminism* are centered on the experiences of Black women and women of color, and as such view women's oppression in terms of simultaneous gender- and race-based disadvantage (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). As I discuss more fully in the third section of this article, this focus on intersecting systems of race and class makes Black

and critical race feminism (along with socialist feminism) the precursors to multiracial feminism. Within criminology, Black and critical race feminists call attention to the discriminatory treatment of non-White women in the criminal justice system, such as judicial instructions to juries in rape trials to forgo the assumption that Black women are chaste (Crenshaw, 1991).

Alternatively, *lesbian feminism* links women's oppression to heterosexism and men's control of women's social spaces by "[taking] the radical feminist pessimistic view of men to its logical conclusion," whereas *Third World feminism* views women's oppression as a function of the economic exploitation of women in developing nations (Lorber, 2001, p. 99; see also Belknap, 2001). Examples of these latter two perspectives are not as common in criminology as examples of the previous perspectives, although this appears to be changing. For example, the past decade has seen an increase in domestic violence research that examines the experiences of lesbian (Renzetti, 1992), immigrant (Bui, 2004), and Muslim (Hajjar, 2004) battered women.

It is clear that each of these feminist perspectives represents a unique way of theorizing about women's oppression and about the linkages between inequality and crime. However, as I argue throughout this article, it is not any of these perspectives but the perspective of *multiracial feminism* that is most relevant to feminist criminology in the 21st century.

### **The Emergence of Feminist Criminology**

Having outlined these feminist perspectives, it is now possible to trace the emergence of feminist criminology. Historically, the feminist movement is divided into three eras or waves. The first wave of feminism began in the United States with the birth of the abolitionist and women's suffrage movements in the mid-to-late 1800s. Criminology itself was still developing at this time, as scholars such as Lombroso and Durkheim (in Europe) and Kellor (in the United States) began theorizing about crime and deviance (Beirne & Messerschmidt, 2000). Some 100 years later, the women's liberation and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s marked the genesis of second-wave feminism. It is during this era that feminism made its appearance in criminology.

Theoretically speaking, feminist criminology developed because (primarily liberal) feminist scholars objected to the exclusion of gender from criminological analyses, an omission that seemed particularly glaring given that gender is such a strong predictor of offending (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996), arrest (Stolzenberg & D'Alessio, 2004), and sentencing outcomes (Daly, 1994; Daly & Tonry, 1997). Feminist scholars were dissatisfied with the failure of mainstream criminology to recognize issues of gender inequality at all, as well as with the failure of critical and radical criminology to consider the relationship between inequality and crime outside of the narrow context of economic disparities, under which were subsumed issues of race and gender (see Beirne & Messerschmidt, 2000). In particular,

feminist criminologists protested the exclusion of women's experiences in emerging "general" theories of crime, which were being developed by mainstream criminologists using almost exclusively male samples to predict patterns of male delinquency (Barak, 1998; Belknap, 2001; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Flavin, 2004; Miller, 2004; Milovanovic & Schwartz, 1996; Morash, 1999). These early feminist criminologists demanded that analyses of crime include consideration of gender in ways that had not occurred before.

It is important to note here that feminist criminology was born during a crucial juncture of the feminist movement. Shortly after the beginning of the second wave in the 1970s, feminists of minority-group status found that their experiences were underrepresented in mainstream feminism and subsequently levied sharp criticism toward their majority-group counterparts whose voices were purported to speak on behalf of all women. Feminists of color, lesbian feminists, Third World feminists, and feminists from other marginalized groups condemned the hegemony of White, middle-class, heterosexual experience that characterized mainstream second-wave feminism at that time. As I discuss more fully in the following section, it is against this backdrop that feminist criminology emerged, and claims of essentialism and reductionism soon plagued the broader feminist movement as well as feminist criminology in particular.

Finally, second-wave feminism gave way to third-wave feminism during the 1980s and 1990s. A defining feature of third-wave feminism is its focus on multiplicities or the belief that there exist multiple genders, races, and sexualities. With this idea in mind and echoing earlier criticisms, many third-wave feminists expressed dissatisfaction with the insufficient treatment of race, class, sexuality, and other locations of inequality in mainstream feminist scholarship. As a result, it is during contemporary third-wave feminism that intersectionality first appeared (Price & Sokoloff, 2004).<sup>3</sup> Intersectionality recognizes that systems of power such as race, class, and gender do not act alone to shape our experiences but rather, are multiplicative, inextricably linked, and simultaneously experienced. Feminist criminologists writing at this time also recognized the need for intersectionality (Daly, 1993; Daly & Stephens, 1995). For example, Daly and Stephens (1995) observed that an intersectional approach to studying crime explores

how class, gender, and race (and age and sexuality) construct the normal and deviant . . . how these inequalities put some societal members at risk to be rendered deviant or to engage in law-breaking, and . . . how law and state institutions both challenge and reproduce these inequalities. (p. 193)

This timeline of events allows for a more thorough understanding of the development of feminist thought during second-wave and early third-wave feminism. In the following section, I describe in detail how feminist approaches to studying gender have evolved in the past 30 years, largely in response to the events outlined above.

### **The Evolution of Feminist Approaches to Gender: Sameness, Difference, and Dominance**

Shortly after the inception of second-wave feminism, one question divided feminists more sharply than perhaps any other: Are women essentially similar to men such that the sexes should be treated equally (i.e., the sameness approach) or do women have distinctive characteristics that require special treatment to overcome their gender-based discrimination (i.e., the difference approach)? This question loomed large among feminists, with proponents of each side lamenting the threat posed by the opposing viewpoint to the advancement of women's rights. For example, opponents of the difference approach argued that *difference* often is nothing more than a euphemism for *discrimination*, as well as that championing women's differences ultimately leads to their exclusion from certain roles, particularly within the workplace (MacKinnon, 1991; Nagel & Johnson, 2004; Williams, 1991). Conversely, opponents of the sameness approach believed in a gender dichotomy and claimed that women suffer from an equal-treatment model because, under the guise of gender neutrality, women's status ultimately is measured against a dominant male norm (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; MacKinnon, 1991; Nagel & Johnson, 2004).

The sameness/difference debate that surfaced in the broader feminist movement also appeared in feminist criminology. For example, advocates of the sameness approach supported gender-neutral, "equal treatment under the law" measures, such as symmetrical correctional programming meant to guarantee male and female inmates access to the same vocational and educational resources (Barak et al., 2001). Furthermore, supporters of this equal-treatment model worried about the hidden dangers of the difference approach, wherein women's difference from men translates into their need for greater legal protection, as in the case of statutory rape laws:

Statutory rape is, in criminal law terms, a clear instance of a victimless crime, since all parties are, by definition, voluntary participants. In what sense, then, can [Supreme Court Justice] Rehnquist assert [in a 1981 decision upholding California's statutory rape law] that the woman is victim and the man offender? One begins to get an inkling when, later, the Justice explains that the statutory rape law is "protective" legislation. . . . The notion that men are frequently the sexual aggressors and that the law ought to be able to take that reality into account in very concrete ways is hardly one that feminists could reject out of hand. . . . it is therefore an area . . . in which we need to pay special attention to our impulses lest we inadvertently support and give credence to the very social constructs and behaviors we so earnestly mean to oppose. (Williams, 1991, pp. 20-21)

However, critics of the sameness approach argued that this model actually harms women because the law is not gender neutral but in fact assumes a male standard (MacKinnon, 1991; Williams, 1991). Given this male standard, women's legal claims have the potential to be regarded as requiring special or preferential treatment (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1998). For example, considering parenthood as a mitigating factor in sentencing decisions, although applied "equally" to all defendants, disproportionately benefits female defendants with children (or "familied" women) and unintentionally

punishes childless women (Barak et al., 2001; Daly, 1989; Daly & Tonry, 1997). Furthermore, critics recognized that the desire to standardize sentencing practices in the name of “equal justice” may carry unintended consequences for women:

A major problem is that [equal-treatment] sentencing reforms are designed to reduce race- and class-based disparities in sentencing men. Their application to female offenders may yield equality with a vengeance: a higher rate of incarceration and for longer periods of time than in the past. Like reforms in divorce . . . and in child custody . . . devised with liberal feminist definitions of equality, sentencing reform also may prove unjust and may work ultimately against women. (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 525)

Despite the stark contrast in the orientation of the sameness and difference models, both approaches share a commonality: They are rooted in simplistic notions of women’s and men’s equality that are characteristic of liberal feminism. Recall that liberal feminism emphasizes political, social, legal, and economic equality between the sexes. Therefore, theoretical paradigms such as the sameness and difference models that fail to place gender relations in the context of patriarchy fit squarely within the perspective of liberal feminism. Furthermore, as many feminists have observed, the sameness and difference models also share the same fundamental flaw: They essentially ignore issues of power and privilege (Barak et al., 2001; MacKinnon, 1991; Sokoloff, Price, & Flavin, 2004). Put differently, both approaches fail to acknowledge disparities in power between the sexes; consequently, sameness and/or difference cannot be considered meaningfully without regard for women’s subordinate status in a patriarchal society. As MacKinnon (1991) noted, although “men’s differences from women are equal to women’s differences from men . . . the sexes are not socially equal” (p. 85).

In an effort to improve upon previous models that were informed by liberal feminism and that offered elementary comparisons of men and women without regard for the effects of patriarchy, radical feminists writing at the beginning of the third wave argued for the adoption of a dominance approach to studying gender. The dominance approach is informed by radical feminism because it recognizes how patriarchy shapes gender relations and considers gender differences within the context of power and oppression (Barak et al., 2001; MacKinnon, 1991). “For women to affirm difference, when difference means dominance, as it does with gender, means to affirm the qualities and characteristics of powerlessness” (MacKinnon, 1991, p. 86). Moreover, supporters argued that the dominance approach was the only truly feminist paradigm. According to radical feminists, the sameness and difference approaches are masculinist inasmuch as they use a male referent, whereas the dominance approach, “in that it sees the inequalities of the social world from the standpoint of the subordination of women to men, is feminist” (MacKinnon, 1991, p. 86).

Feminist criminologists also recognized the value of using the dominance approach. For example, Barak et al. (2001) maintain that the utility of the dominance model for feminist criminologists rests in its attention to power: “For example, proponents of the dominance approach have been instrumental in pressuring the legal system to abandon its ‘hands-off’ attitude toward domestic violence and to define wife battering and



marital rape as crimes” (p. 154). Furthermore, the dominance approach has value for feminist criminologists because its emphasis on power and privilege dovetails with related issues of inequality in the criminal justice system.

However, despite its appeal, the dominance approach was criticized by many early third-wave feminists—primarily women of color, lesbian women, and women from other marginalized groups—for essentializing women (Andersen & Collins, 2004; Baca Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotello, & Messner, 2000; Barak et al., 2001; Belknap, 2001; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). “Essentialism occurs when a voice—typically a white, heterosexual, and socioeconomically privileged voice—claims to speak for everyone” (Sokoloff et al., 2004, p. 12). By asserting that women universally suffer the effects of patriarchy, the dominance approach rests on the dubious assumption that all women, by virtue of their shared gender, have a common “experience” in the first place. In short, the dominance approach is reductionist because it assumes that all women are oppressed by all men in exactly the same ways or that there is one unified experience of dominance experienced by women. Soon after these criticisms first emerged in the broader feminist movement, feminist criminologists began contemplating their own acts of essentialism. In the words of Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988), “One of the many challenges for feminism in general and feminist criminology in particular is the paradox of acknowledging diversity among women while claiming women’s unity in experiences of oppression and sexism” (p. 502).

To summarize, although the sameness and difference approaches to gender that characterized second-wave feminism were replaced by the dominance model during early third-wave feminism, this approach also has serious flaws. What the dominance approach leaves out, of course, is the idea of multiple, intersecting sites of dominance that include, but are not limited to, gender. Moreover, this approach leaves many questions unanswered, and indeed unanswerable: Do women of color or lesbian women who are “multiply burdened” experience dominance in the same ways as straight White women? What about women victims and offenders? How do they experience dominance, both by perpetrators and by practitioners of the criminal justice system? Although these questions are rendered rhetorical using the dominance approach, they may be answered using a theoretical orientation that recognizes issues of power and privilege without assuming a monolithic women’s experience: multiracial feminism.

### **Beyond Dominance: Multiracial Feminism and Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender**

As discussed in the previous section, the promise of the dominance approach was not shared by women who felt marginalized by “the hegemony of feminisms constructed primarily around the lives of white–middle class women” (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, p. 321).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the dominance approach, for all of its positive attributes, is unidimensional in the sense that it merely examines women’s experiences vis-à-vis men’s experiences. In contrast, contemporary feminists now face a more multidimensional question: How do we move away from the “false universalism

embedded in the concept ‘woman’” toward an examination of gender in the context of other locations of inequality (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, p. 322)?

This question is not easily answered, and previous attempts by feminist scholars to acknowledge systems of power other than gender resulted in a rather benign emphasis on “diversity.” As Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996) comment,

Despite the much heralded diversity trend within feminist studies, difference is often reduced to mere pluralism; a “live and let live” approach where principles of relativism generate a long list of diversities which begin with gender, class, and race and continue through a range of social structural as well as personal characteristics. . . . The major limitation of these approaches is the failure to attend to the power relations that accompany difference. Moreover, these approaches ignore the inequalities that cause some characteristics to be seen as “normal” while others are seen as “different” and thus, deviant. (p. 323)

For example, as “outsiders within” the feminist movement, women of color protested the complicity of “unitary theories of gender” in mainstream feminism (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, p. 321; see also Collins, 2000). Building on the criticisms wielded by feminists of color, a new paradigm has emerged in contemporary third-wave feminism that advances feminist thought beyond issues of sameness, difference, or dominance.<sup>5</sup> The “intersectional” model, informed by multiracial feminism, has succeeded in examining gender through the lens of difference while at the same time acknowledging the instrumental role of power in shaping gender relations. That is, guided by the perspective of multiracial feminism, the intersectional approach successfully attends to issues of power and dominance while achieving a universal relevance that has eluded previous approaches to studying gender.

It is sometimes difficult to disentangle concepts embedded in multiracial feminism from concepts embedded in intersections of race, class, and gender. In an attempt to elucidate these ideas, I have divided the following section in half. The first half describes key conceptual features of multiracial feminism. The second half discusses the advantages of adopting an intersectional (or “race-class-gender”) approach to studying gender that is informed by multiracial feminism. Together, both halves of the following section are intended to highlight the importance of intersectionality for feminist criminology.

### **Multiracial Feminism**

Multiracial feminism was pioneered by women of color who recognized the need to construct approaches to studying gender that attended to issues of power and difference in ways that previous models had not (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). Although this perspective is known by a variety of names, including intersectionality theory and multicultural feminism, the term *multiracial feminism* is preferred because it emphasizes “race as a power system that interacts with other structured inequalities to shape genders” (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, p. 324). Still, the main focus is on interlocking and multiple inequalities (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996; Thompson, 2002).

Multiracial feminism has several key conceptual features that distinguish it from other feminist perspectives and that make it ideal for promoting theoretical advancement for feminist criminology. First, multiracial feminism proposes that gender relations do not occur in a vacuum but, instead, that men and women also are characterized by their race, class, sexuality, age, physical ability, and other locations of inequality (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). Put differently, this perspective emphasizes that a power hierarchy—what Collins (2000) calls the “matrix of domination”—exists in which people are socially situated according to their differences from one another. Feminists who operate within this perspective interpret gender as being *socially constructed* through interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and other sources of inequality (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). In turn,

this structural pattern affects individual consciousness, group interaction, and group access to institutional power and privileges . . . within this framework, [the focus is] less on the similarities and differences among race, class, and gender than on patterns of connection that join them. (Andersen & Collins, 2004, p. 7)

In a related manner, multiracial feminism proposes that these intersections occur simultaneously and, therefore, create a distinct *social location* for each individual (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). In other words, the various axes of the matrix of domination intersect to create a particular status within the broader social structure, which constitutes one’s social location (Andersen & Collins, 2004). “A key element to class-race-gender is that social relations are viewed in multiple and interactive terms—not as additive” (Daly, 1993, p. 56). Thus, the main point here is that these elements work multiplicatively to shape one’s social location. Although at a given time race, class, or gender might feel more relevant, “they are overlapping and cumulative in their effect on people’s experience” (Andersen & Collins, 2004, p. 7).

Second, multiracial feminism calls attention to the ways in which intersecting systems of power act on all social-structural levels:

Class, race, gender, and sexuality are components of *both* social structure *and* social interaction. Women and men are differently embedded in locations created by these cross-cutting hierarchies. As a result, women and men throughout the social order experience different forms of privilege and subordination. (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, p. 327, italics added)<sup>6</sup>

One important concept of multiracial feminism that underscores this point is *both/and* (e.g., see Collins, 2000). That is, all people simultaneously experience both oppression and privilege; no individual or group can be entirely privileged or entirely oppressed. In other words,

the theoretical starting point [of this perspective] is that there are multiple and cross-cutting relations of class, race-ethnicity, gender, sexuality and age. This produces a matrix of domination taking a “both/and” form . . . not a simple additive model of structural subordinate relations. (Daly & Stephens, 1995, pp. 206-207)

Third, multiracial feminism is centered on the concept of *relationality*; that is, it assumes that groups of people are socially situated in relation to other groups of people based on their differences. “This means that women’s differences are *connected* in systematic ways” (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, p. 327, emphasis in original). More important, relationality should not be thought of as a unilateral concept. To illustrate, multiracial feminism assumes that the experiences of women are structurally linked, such that some women benefit from the oppression of other women who occupy a lower social position, even when (or perhaps especially when) the former are not cognizant of the benefits that their privileged status provides. In this way, multiracial feminism retains an emphasis on power and privilege but avoids essentializing women’s experiences. As Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996) observe, “Multiracial feminism highlights the relational nature of dominance and subordination. Power is the cornerstone of women’s differences” (p. 327).

Last, other key conceptual features of multiracial feminism include a focus on the interaction of social structure and women’s agency, a reliance on a variety of methodological approaches, and an emphasis on understandings grounded in the lived experiences of dynamic groups of women (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). Together, these features distinguish multiracial feminism from other feminist perspectives. Although some feminist perspectives share certain of these conceptual features (e.g., postmodern feminism’s emphasis on the social construction of reality; socialist, Black, and critical race feminism’s attention to interacting systems of power), taken in total these characteristics make multiracial feminism truly unique among feminist perspectives.

### **The Intersectional Approach to Gender: Using a Race-Class-Gender Framework**

Feminists who operate from the perspective of multiracial feminism advocate for an intersectional approach to studying gender. The intersectional approach recognizes that race, class, gender, sexuality, and other locations of inequality are dynamic, historically grounded, socially constructed power relationships that simultaneously operate at both the micro-structural and macro-structural levels (Andersen & Collins, 2004; Weber, 2001; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003).

In many ways, the development of this intersectional approach to studying gender may be viewed as a natural progression of feminist thought. Recall that the sameness and difference approaches, which are informed by liberal feminism, were criticized by radical feminists who favored the dominance approach because it attends to issues of power and privilege. Likewise, feminists dissatisfied with the primacy of gender in the dominance approach have advocated for the adoption of the intersectional approach, which is informed by multiracial feminism and which does not prioritize gender over other systems of power. Thus, applying a race-class-gender framework to the study of gender may be regarded as the next step in the evolution of feminist thought.

An example from the sentencing literature helps to clarify this point. According to Daly and Tonry (1997), criminologists and legal scholars have adopted three modes of

conceptualizing race and gender in criminal law and criminal justice practice: (a) law and practices as racist/sexist, (b) law and practices as White/male, and (c) law and practices as racialized/gendered. The first mode (racist/sexist) parallels the sameness approach because “differential treatment is seen as synonymous with discrimination” and because liberal feminists would “be most comfortable” with this mode (p. 236). The second mode (White/male) is equivalent to the dominance approach because it is concerned with challenging the use of a White, male referent. As Daly and Tonry note,

Virtually all empirical work on race and gender disparities (and our assessment of it) is framed within a racist/sexist perspective in that the research centers on whether sanctions are applied differently across varied racial-ethnic, gender groups. However, a new generation of feminists and critical race scholars has raised questions about the limits this conceptualization imposes on theory, research and policy . . . [and] are more likely to embrace the latter two modes. (p. 235)

The third mode (racialized/gendered) corresponds to the intersectional approach because it “assumes that race and gender relations structure criminal law and justice system practices” in important ways (p. 237). Thus, the third (intersectional) mode of conceptualizing race and gender has evolved in response to the inadequacies of previous paradigms.

For these reasons, the intersectional approach that is informed by multiracial feminism offers feminists the broadest, richest, and most complete theoretical framework for studying gender. Because all social relations are racialized, including those that appear not to be, multiracial feminism achieves a universal relevance that remains elusive to other feminist perspectives. In Daly and Stephens’s (1995) words,

Although many claim that black women are at the intersection of class, race, and gender, that statement is misleading. Black women are *marked* at the intersection as being on the subordinate side of these three relations, but all social groups (including middle-class white men) are at the intersection. (p. 205)

A race-class-gender framework is applicable to the lives of all people, regardless of their social location:

At the same time that structures of race, class, and gender create disadvantages for women of color, they provide unacknowledged benefits for those who are at the top of these hierarchies—Whites, members of upper classes, and males. Therefore, multiracial feminism applies not only to racial ethnic women but also to women and men of all races, classes, and genders. (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, p. 327)

It is clear, then, that multiracial feminism and the intersectional framework through which it operates hold great promise for contemporary feminist scholarship.

## **Multiracial Feminism and Criminology: Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Crime**

For several reasons, multiracial feminism and the intersectional approach can make important contributions to feminist criminology. Although still an emerging body of scholarship, some feminists (as well as some nonfeminists) have already begun urging the adoption of an intersectional approach to studying crime (e.g., Barak et al., 2001; Belknap, 2001; Britton, 2004; Daly, 1993, 1997; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Daly & Stephens, 1995; Flavin, 2004; Lynch, 1996; Milovanovic & Schwartz, 1996; Price & Sokoloff, 2004; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Zatz, 2000). However, despite this support for a race-class-gender framework, to date few feminist criminologists have embraced the intersectional approach. Below I outline several reasons why contemporary third-wave feminist criminologists should adopt an intersectional framework.

### **The Theoretical Relevance of Intersections**

Criminologists have begun to recognize the importance of developing integrated criminological theories. As Barak (1998) argues, criminology stands to benefit from the integration of criminological perspectives. Although a thorough discussion of integrating criminologies is beyond the scope of this article, Barak's overall point helps justify the use of the intersectional approach and multiracial feminism. For example, Barak observes that race, class, and gender have been "autonomously" applied to the study of crime, whereas in the past decade feminist criminologists have begun to focus on the interaction between two or more of these variables as they relate to crime (p. 251). According to Barak, an integrated theoretical perspective "incorporates an appreciation of differences in the patterns of crime attributed to socialization, opportunities, and bias in the context that everyone's life is framed by inequalities of race, class, and gender" (p. 251).

In a similar manner, multiracial feminism emphasizes that intersecting systems of race, class, and gender act as "structuring forces" affecting how people act, the opportunities that are available to them, and the way in which their behavior is socially defined (Lynch, 1996, p. 4). For criminologists, this includes examining how the legal system responds to individual offenders based on their social locations (Barak et al., 2001). For example, Steffensmeier, Ulmer, and Kramer (1998) studied the interaction of race, gender, and age in sentencing decisions and discovered that outcomes are most punitive for defendants whose social locations place them at the margins of race, age, and gender systems—in other words, young Black men. The findings of Steffensmeier et al. "demonstrate the importance of considering the joint effects of race, gender, and age on sentencing, and of using interactive rather than additive models" (p. 763). In a similar manner, Spohn and Holleran (2000) discovered that punishment penalties also are paid by defendants in other marginalized social locations: young, unemployed Black and Hispanic men.

Therefore, concepts and propositions found in multiracial feminism may be integrated with concepts and propositions found in existing criminological theories to achieve the type of integrated perspective that Barak (1998) described. To illustrate, the preceding examples from the sentencing literature represent conceptual theoretical integration. That is, the concept of social location from multiracial feminism and the concept (or “focal concern”) of *offender blameworthiness* from sentencing theory overlap in a meaningful, theoretical way to explain how defendants’ demographic characteristics influence judicial decision making (Steffensmeier et al., 1998).

Moreover, initial attempts at theorizing about inequality and crime using an intersectional framework have already occurred. For example, Sampson and Wilson (1995) developed their theory of race, crime, and urban inequality by examining intersecting race and class inequalities. Taking this approach one step further, Lynch (1996) has attempted to develop a theory of race, class, gender inequality, and crime in four ways by (a) “linking race, class, and critical criminology to life course or life history research”; (b) “connecting race, class, and gender to the types of choices that are structured into people’s lives”; (c) “demonstrating life course and structured choice effects by reviewing data on income, wealth, and power disparities that arise from race, gender and class inequality”; and (d) “examining how race, class and gender intersect to affect the production of crime” (p. 3).

Finally, several feminist criminologists have used intersectionality to theorize about the relationship between inequality and crime. For example, Richie (1996) shows how intersecting systems of race, class, and gender can lead battered Black women to commit criminal offenses. In her analysis, Richie uses the concept of *gender entrapment* to explain how “some women are forced or coerced into crime by their culturally expected gender roles, the violence in their intimate relationships, and their social position in the broader society” (p. 133). In a similar manner, Maher (1997) explores intersections of race, class, and gender in the lives of women who participate in the street-level drug economy. In her study, Maher describes how explanations of women’s involvement with the drug economy have shifted from “primarily class-based explanations towards acknowledgement of a more complex set of cross-cutting influences—race/ethnicity, sex/gender, age, immigrant status, and other social relations” (p. 169). Most recently, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) argue for the use of an intersectional framework in developing theories of domestic violence (see also Sokoloff & Pratt, 2005). Sokoloff and Dupont observe that intersectional approaches to domestic violence

question the monolithic nature of woman battering, call for a greater emphasis on the structural causes of woman battering, caution against disempowering representations of marginalized battered women, and explore the complex role of culture in understanding woman abuse and our responses to it. (p. 40)

As these examples illustrate, an intersectional theoretical framework that is informed by multiracial feminism can be instrumental to the advancement of criminological theory.

## The Methodological Relevance of Intersections

In addition to the unique theoretical contributions that this framework can make to feminist criminology, the intersectional approach offers feminist criminologists the opportunity to interrogate crime and deviance in a manner that goes beyond regression models and statistical analyses (Daly, 1993; Daly & Stephens, 1995; Lynch, 1996; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Of course, this does not mean that quantitative methods have no place in intersectional analyses. On the contrary, the aforementioned studies conducted by Steffensmeier et al. (1998) and Spohn and Holleran (2000) use quantitative methods to investigate the effect of social location on sentencing outcomes and make important contributions to intersectional scholarship. Rather, the important point here is that the intersectional approach invites researchers to use empirical methods that can explore what it is like to “live as” a victim or offender in a particular social location (Lynch, 1996). In other words, feminist criminologists seeking to move beyond strictly quantitative investigations of population data to identify ways in which individual characteristics mediate intersecting systems of inequality such as race, class, and gender may wish to use qualitative or mixed-methods designs (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003).

To illustrate, qualitative methodologies such as ethnography and neighborhood studies allow us to understand “processes of conformity and deviance are gendered and racialized, the conditions of street life and illicit work for women, and how once they are immersed in the street life and subject to criminalization, women’s options are narrowed” (Daly & Stephens, 1995, p. 207; e.g., see Maher, 1997; Richie, 1996). In addition, Way (2004) has suggested that historical institutionalism, a qualitative empirical method that examines how institutional structures influence a phenomenon with time, is particularly well suited for conducting intersectional analyses. Guided by the multiracial feminist proposition that individuals are situated in the hierarchical social order based on their social locations, the use of historical institutionalism to place “women within a historical and institutional context may help researchers flesh out female lawbreakers’ intersectional existence” (Way, 2004, p. 88).

Perhaps most befitting of the intersections approach, mixed-methods designs that employ both quantitative and qualitative analyses have much to offer feminist criminologists wishing to produce intersectional scholarship. First, quantitative and qualitative strategies frequently grant access to different types of data. For example, quantitative methods are especially useful for uncovering macro-level social processes, whereas qualitative methods are especially useful for uncovering micro-level social processes. Given concern for the simultaneity of micro- and macro-level systems that characterizes the intersectional approach, analyses of the ways in which these processes are concurrently produced may be best achieved by combining qualitative and quantitative data.<sup>7</sup>

Second, qualitative methods are particularly advantageous when the topic of interest is sensitive or difficult to discuss (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993); thus, a combined strategy may be more successful in exploring personal experiences with social power and privilege than a purely quantitative design. In a similar manner, qualitative inter-



view questions are especially useful for gathering detailed information from participants. Therefore, in-depth follow-up questions that antecede more general, broad-based interview questions may grant researchers greater insight into participants' self-reported experiences with intersecting race, class, and gender systems (Fisher & Cullen, 2000; Huizinga & Elliott, 1986).

For example, Bridges and Steen (1998) used a mixed-methods design to examine racial disparities in probation officers' assessments of juvenile offenders. Although the quantitative analysis reveals that differential attributions about the causes of crime mediate the relationship between race and officers' sentencing recommendations, a qualitative analysis of officers' narrative reports suggests that "aspects of social context" are as important to officers as are legal variables such as prior criminal history (Bridges & Steen, 1998, p. 558). From the results of the qualitative data analysis, Bridges and Steen conclude, "Some offenders are perceived as threatening and at risk of reoffending because their personal characteristics [i.e., their social location] and their behavior are salient in officials' working explanations of criminal behavior" (p. 567).<sup>8</sup> In this instance, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods offers unique insight into the ways in which race (and other aspects of a defendant's social location) influences his or her treatment in the criminal justice system. As this example illustrates, a research design that uses a qualitative or mixed-methods approach can be particularly relevant to producing intersectional scholarship.

### **The Praxis-Related Relevance of Intersections**

Finally, multiracial feminism and the intersectional approach offer feminist criminologists the chance to translate theory into action. Perhaps the most important opportunity for praxis concerns the pursuit of social justice that forms the cornerstone of the intersectional approach (Andersen & Collins, 2004; Thompson, 2002; Weber, 2001; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Specifically, intersectional scholarship can advance social justice goals by providing insight into social and political contexts that reinforce power relations and by uncovering processes of resistance that can alter hierarchical systems of inequality (Weber, 2001). Put differently,

by placing primary attention on the construction of multiple social inequalities as they are simultaneously produced, [intersectional] research is particularly well-suited to addressing the question of disparities in our social worlds . . . and seeks activism for social justice . . . for all people as an integral part of the knowledge acquisition process. (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003, p. 185)

With respect to multiracial feminism, some feminists have argued that its commitment to social justice distinguishes it entirely from alternative feminist perspectives:

There are multiple strategies for social justice embedded in multiracial feminism. . . . Multiracial feminism is not just another brand of feminism that can be taught alongside liberal, radical, and socialist feminism. Multiracial feminism is the heart of an inclusive women's liberation struggle. The race-class-gender-sexuality-nationality framework

through which multiracial feminism operates encompasses and goes way beyond liberal, radical, and socialist feminist priorities—and it always has. (Thompson, 2002, p. 349)

In addition, unlike other feminist perspectives, one hallmark of multiracial feminism is its emphasis on forming coalitions across racial divides. Indeed, coalition building is a theme often echoed by scholars who advocate for an intersectional framework (e.g., Collins, 2000; Thompson, 2002). For example, Daly and Stephens (1995) note that as is the case with multiracial feminism, promising transformative coalition opportunities exist when dominance-based feminist perspectives are combined with critical race perspectives that reflect the experiences of people of color, and that “the need to build such coalitions could not be more urgent” (p. 208). Opportunities for coalition building coupled with commitment to social justice make multiracial feminism and the intersectional approach a crucial strategy for achieving feminist criminologist praxis.

## Conclusion

For the reasons outlined in this article, feminist criminologists wishing to advance inclusive analyses of race, class, gender, and crime would do well to adopt an intersectional framework that is informed by multiracial feminism. In one of the few existing criminological texts advocating the use of the intersectional approach, Barak et al. (2001) noted several promising developments for intersectionality in criminology. Of these, perhaps most relevant to feminist criminology is “scholarship that shifts the emphasis [of criminology] on identifying systems of privilege that support existing systems of oppression but are rarely acknowledged by those who reap the benefits” (p. 234).

Indeed, feminist criminologists have long been critical of scholarship that remains blind to issues of power and privilege. For contemporary third-wave feminist criminologists, the time has come to build on the foundation that has been laid for us by our predecessors and to advance a feminist criminology that embraces all sources of oppression without prioritizing gender. After all, as multiracial feminism reveals, power, privilege, and oppression are multiplicative and intersecting according to race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, age, and other defining social characteristics. As we take stock of our field and look ahead to the future, the words of Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) are instructive:

Turning to the future, we wonder what will happen as increasing numbers of white women, as well as men and women of color, enter the discipline and try to find their place in it. One cannot expect that the first generation of new scholars will be confident or sure-footed after centuries of exclusion from the academy. One might expect, however, that we will ask different questions or pursue problems which our discipline has ignored. (p. 506)

In the coming years, successful examination of the ways in which women (and men) in the criminal justice system experience oppression by virtue of their race, class,

and gender characteristics must be grounded in an intersectional framework that is informed by multiracial feminism:

Research and theorizing must continue to reject the essentialism inherent in treating women as a unitary category. . . . We already know much about the ways in which race, class, and sexual inequality interweave with women's experiences as victims, offenders, and workers. The challenge for feminist criminology in the years to come lies in formulating theory and carrying out empirical studies that prioritize all of these dimensions, rather than relegating one or more of them to the background for the sake of methodological convenience. (Britton, 2004, p. 71)

In time, such advances will no doubt constitute the very core of feminist criminology in the 21st century.

## Notes

1. See Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) for a thoughtful comparison of these feminist perspectives.
2. For example, recent feminist research identifies the concept of "blurred boundaries" between women's victimization and offending experiences (e.g., Daly & Maher, 1998; Gaarder & Belknap, 2002; Moe, 2004).
3. According to Thompson (2002), intersectionality actually emerged during the 1970s. That is, at the beginning of the second wave of the feminist movement, women of color (as well as White antiracist women and others who felt marginalized by mainstream feminism) began calling for scholarship that simultaneously attended to issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. However, the concept of intersecting inequalities first appeared in criminology during the 1980s, corresponding to feminism's third wave. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, intersectionality is presented as a product of third-wave feminism.
4. In fact, the mainstream second-wave feminist movement was labeled "hegemonic feminism" by some women of color and White antiracist women for its exclusive use of a White, middle-class, heterosexual female standard (Thompson, 2002).
5. Again, see Thompson (2002) for a discussion of the timing of the emergence of multiracial feminism.
6. However, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) have argued that social structure is "rarely" the focus of analyses rooted in multiracial feminism.
7. However, as one anonymous reviewer correctly noted, some strictly quantitative techniques such as nested modeling are similarly useful for these types of analysis because they make it possible to explore variation in individual-level variables (such as race, class, or gender) across community- or neighborhood-level contexts.
8. This finding also supports the integration of social location and offender blameworthiness discussed previously.

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