THE ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT OF WOMEN OFFENDERS

An integrative perspective

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THE ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT OF WOMEN OFFENDERS

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Thank you,
Mark, Spencer, Charlie
and
Murray, William and Lydia

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kelley Blanchette completed her doctorate in forensic psychology at Carleton University, Ottawa, in 2005. Her dissertation was focused on the development and field validation of a gender-informed security classification scale for women offenders. The scale has subsequently been implemented into national practice within the Canadian federal correctional system.

Dr Blanchette has been working with the Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, since 1993. She is currently the Director of Women Offender Research, and she has published extensively in this area.

Shelley Brown completed her doctorate in forensic psychology at Queen's University, Kingston in 2002. Her dissertation focused on understanding the criminal recidivism process with a specific interest in exploring how changes in dynamic risk factors influence criminal recidivism.

Dr Brown has over ten years' experience working with the Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada. During this time her research with women focused primarily on developing gender-informed assessment strategies. Currently, she is the Research Advisor to the National Parole Board of Canada. She is also an adjunct professor with Carleton University and teaches a criminology research methods course.

SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

ABOUT THE SERIES

At the time of writing it is clear that we live in a time, certainly in the UK and other parts of Europe – if, perhaps, less so in other areas of the world – when there is renewed enthusiasm for constructive approaches to working with offenders to prevent crime. What do we mean by this statement and what basis do we have for making it?

First, by 'constructive approaches to working with offenders' we mean bringing the use of effective methods and techniques of behaviour change into work with offenders. Indeed, this view might pass as a definition of forensic clinical psychology. Thus, our focus is the application of theory and research in order to develop practice aimed at bringing about a change in the offender's functioning. The word *constructive* is important and can be set against approaches to behaviour change that seek to operate by destructive means. Such destructive approaches are typically based on the principles of deterrence and punishment, seeking to suppress the offender's actions through fear and intimidation. A constructive approach, on the other hand, seeks to bring about changes in an offender's functioning that will produce, say, enhanced possibilities of employment, greater levels of self-control, better family functioning, or increased awareness of the pain of victims.

A constructive approach faces the criticism of being a 'soft' response to the damage caused by offenders, neither inflicting pain and punishment nor delivering retribution. This point raises a serious question for those involved in working with offenders. Should advocates of constructive approaches oppose retribution as a goal of the criminal justice system as a process that is incompatible with treatment and rehabilitation? Alternatively, should constructive work with offenders take place within a system given to retribution? We believe that this issue merits serious debate.

However, to return to our starting point, history shows that criminal justice systems are littered with many attempts at constructive work with offenders, not all of which have been successful. In raising the spectre of success, the second part of our opening sentence now merits attention: that is, 'constructive approaches to working with offenders *to prevent crime*'. In order to achieve the goal of preventing crime, interventions must focus on the right targets for

behaviour change. In addressing this crucial point, Andrews and Bonta (1994) have formulated the *need principle*:

> Many offenders, especially high-risk offenders, have a variety of needs. They need places to live and work and/or they need to stop taking drugs. Some have poor self-esteem, chronic headaches or cavities in their teeth. These are all 'needs'. The need principle draws our attention to the distinction between *criminogenic* and *non-criminogenic* needs. Criminogenic needs are a subset of an offender's risk level. They are dynamic attributes of an offender that, when changed, are associated with changes in the probability of recidivism. Non-criminogenic needs are also dynamic and changeable, but these changes are not necessarily associated with the probability of recidivism. (p. 176)

Thus, successful work with offenders can be judged in terms of bringing about change in non-criminogenic need *or* in terms of bringing about change in criminogenic need. While the former is important and, indeed, may be a necessary precursor to offence-focused work, it is changing criminogenic need that, we argue, should be the touchstone in working with offenders.

While, as noted above, the history of work with offenders is not replete with success, the research base developed since the early 1990s, particularly the meta-analyses (e.g. Lösel, 1995), now strongly supports the position that effective work with offenders to prevent further offending is possible. The parameters of such evidence-based practice have become well established and widely disseminated under the banner of *What Works* (McGuire, 1995).

It is important to state that we are not advocating that there is only one approach to preventing crime. Clearly there are many approaches, with different theoretical underpinnings, that can be applied. Nonetheless, a tangible momentum has grown in the wake of the 'What Works' movement as academics, practitioners and policy-makers seek to capitalize on the possibilities that this research raises for preventing crime. The task now facing many service agencies lies in turning the research into effective practice.

Our aim in developing this Series in Forensic Clinical Psychology is to produce texts that review research and draw on clinical expertise to advance effective work with offenders. We are both committed to the ideal of evidence-based practice and we will encourage contributors to the Series to follow this approach. Thus, the books published in the Series will not be practice manuals or 'cook books': they will offer readers authoritative and critical information through which forensic clinical practice can develop. We are both enthusiastic about the contribution to effective practice that this Series can make and look forward to continuing to develop it in the years to come.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Over the years of its emergence, criminological psychology has focused largely upon white, male offenders of lower socio-economic status. Women offenders

figure among the disregarded groups that are the focus of relatively little research. As a result, services for women offenders have often been adaptations of those developed for men. This hand-me-down approach assumes that what is known about male offenders applies equally to women. There are assumptions that pathways into crime are similar for both sexes, that risk factors are virtually identical, and that treatments that work for men will also work for women. This lazy, unscientific and dismissive approach to women offenders has had its day.

In recent years, we have seen a growth in gender-specific research. A meta-analysis of what works specifically with women offenders was conducted at the end of the last decade (Dowden & Andrews, 1999). One early longitudinal study of delinquency, the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, focused exclusively on boys, but now the data have been revisited to examine criminal careers of the girls in this study's families (Farrington & Painter, 2004). More recent longitudinal studies of antisocial behaviour have included girls alongside boys from the outset as a focus of research (e.g. Fergusson & Horwood, 2002). These studies are signs of a developing interest in a criminological psychology that includes girls and women.

This growing body of knowledge has not been collated and commented upon until now. In this landmark text, Kelley Blanchette and Shelley Brown put a gender-informed criminological psychology firmly on the map. Embedded in a theoretical context, the evidence on risk, needs and responsivity to treatment for women offenders is presented with an impressive degree of scholarship, academic integrity and eloquence. This work will shape correctional services for women offenders in the short term, by presenting policy-makers and practitioners with the evidence on which services should be configured and developed, and in the longer term, by directing researchers towards the gaps in our knowledge that still need to be filled. We are delighted to include this text in our Forensic Clinical Psychology Series.

Mary McMurran and Clive Hollin

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PREFACE

We can now unabashedly proclaim that women and girls no longer constitute 'correctional afterthoughts'. Female-centred theory, research and correctional practice are proliferating. Although encouraging, correctional knowledge specific to girls and women is infinitesimal in comparison to the male-dominated *What Works* literature.

In brief, the 'What Works' repository of knowledge has conclusively demonstrated that correctional intervention can reduce criminal recidivism (Andrews, Bonta & Hoge, 1990; Andrews, Dowden & Gendreau, 1999; Izzo & Ross, 1990; Lipsey, 1995; Lipton, Pearson, Cleland & Yee, 2002). Indeed, the 'average' correctional treatment results in a 10% reduction in recidivism (Andrews et al., 1990b; Lösel, 1995). Moreover, treatment approaches that follow empirically validated principles of effective intervention (Andrews et al., 1990b) yield substantially higher reductions in criminal recidivism, ranging from 26% to 40% (Andrews et al., 1999; Andrews et al., 1990b; Lösel, 1996).

Current correctional practice is decidedly evidence-based; and this is apparent in the post-Martinson proliferation of the 'What Works' literature. Regrettably, the majority of both primary studies and meta-evaluations has either focused exclusively on male offenders, or failed to disaggregate the data by gender. As such, the question remains: Do effective female-specific correctional services differ from effective correctional services in general? If so, how?

These questions are central to this book. Chapter 1 contextualizes the discussion by reviewing the nature and scope of adult female offending. Next, an overview of contemporary theories of female offending is provided in Chapter 2. Specifically, gender-neutral, female-centred, and hybrid theoretical paradigms are described, followed by a review of the corresponding empirical evidence. Chapter 3 provides a description of general issues germane to female offender classification including a discussion of static and dynamic risk, actuarial versus clinical assessment, an introduction to the *Risk–Need–Responsivity (RNR) model of offender rehabilitation* along with contemporary critiques and competing rehabilitation frameworks – the *Good Lives Model*. Throughout, gender assumes a preeminent role in the discussion. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 form the nexus of the book. Each chapter is devoted exclusively to one of three principles of effective offender classification: risk (Chapter 4), need (Chapter 5) and responsivity (Chapter 6). A critical examination of the applicability of each principle to adult female

offenders is provided. In doing so, current knowledge gaps as well as promising research and practices pertaining to women offender classification and rehabilitation are highlighted. Concluding remarks are provided in Chapter 7.

It is important to underscore that our primary focus is women, rather than girls. However, issues pertaining to both girls and women are noted when relevant. Moreover, in the relative absence of research specific to adult females, we rely on the extant literature pertaining to girls. This will become particularly apparent in Chapter 2, *Theories of Female Offending*.

While we have chosen to focus on three specific areas – risk, need and responsivity – we acknowledge that the principles of effective correctional treatment are manifold. For example, Andrews (2001) has outlined 18 specific principles that should be adhered to in order to yield the greatest reductions in criminal recidivism. Similarly, Gendreau, French and Gionet (2004) have identified many of the same principles but have organized them somewhat differently, generating eight, as opposed to 18, specific principles. While we incorporate other principles of effective rehabilitation throughout the discussion, our selected focus is one of both convenience (more research evidence for review) and practical utility – most correctional researchers and practitioners are familiar with the tenets of the risk, need and responsivity principles, and guidelines for their application are straightforward.

We recognize that gender is but one component of diversity. Many of the issues and problems concerning the lack of research (and therefore appropriate practice) pertaining to girls and women could equally be applied to various other groups outside the white male normative standard. We emphatically concur that *one size does not fit all* and that studies must be devoted to various specific offender subpopulations. Considerations include, although are not limited to, culture, ethnicity and disability. Nonetheless, we highlight that the focus of this book is gender and the development of best practices for women within the criminal justice system. While we recognize the heterogeneity within the female offender population, we cannot purport to address all diversity considerations simultaneously. This publication is not a panacea; rather, it aims to provide a starting point for prospective research endeavours and for the provision of correctional intervention for girls and women in a manner that is informed by gender.

Writing this book presented us with, what seemed at times, an insurmountable challenge. As self-identified feminist authors, it seems prudent to disclose at the outset our potential biases. We have both completed our doctoral degrees in experimental forensic psychology. We have each spent over a decade working as researchers in the public sector at the Correctional Service of Canada. Although our day-to-day work is, to some extent, governed by political influences, public policies and the demands of working in an applied setting, this was not the case for the writing of this book. In that sense, this authorship was a truly liberating experience. We could explore several novel areas of interest typically not available to us during our daily work lives. While the book is consistent with our applied research efforts to date, it is nonetheless important to emphasize that the opinions expressed in this publication are our own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Correctional Service of Canada or Canada's National Parole Board.

While our predilection is the scientific method, we acknowledge that there are biases in science and so-called 'objective' methods. We concur that traditional criminology and forensic psychology are best described as sciences conducted by men and about men. Thankfully, this is now changing, in large part due to vocal feminist advocates who tirelessly challenge the status quo.

We believe in the self-correcting nature of science. We believe that the most effective way to improve the lives of all humans, including girls and women entangled within the criminal justice system, is through the thoughtful consideration and application of empirical evidence. By definition, 'empirical' means 'to be amenable to our senses in some way' (Champion, 2006, p. 23). Thus, empiricism incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Consequently, this book incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research results. Notwithstanding that, we acknowledge that our academic training and research experience is primarily quantitative; it is therefore natural that we will inherently favour such approaches. Notably, quantitative research strategies are also the preferred method of most policy decision-makers. More and more, particularly in times of scarce resources, decision-makers continually demand that researchers demonstrate how the results of project 'x' impact the bottom line: How many lives saved? How many dollars spent?

Despite our acknowledged potential biases, we underscore the tremendous benefits of using a multi-method approach; particularly when studying small, diverse, marginalized populations. Each methodology carries with it unique strengths and weaknesses, but the combination of methods yields the greatest dividends in terms of practical research results. Indeed, some of our most rewarding research efforts have been those that have adopted a combined approach (e.g. Blanchette & Taylor, 2005; Brown & Motiuk, 2005).

Although our academic training and professional backgrounds are firmly entrenched in psychology, we similarly concur that there is tremendous value in the integration of diverse theories and practical offender management strategies. Moreover, a comprehensive review of the literature suggests that there are several commonalities among supposedly opposing paradigms. The writing of this book has provided us with an opportunity to integrate and reconcile alternative approaches against the backdrop of traditional psychological thought. In the process, there were certainly some epiphanic moments.

It merits reiteration that we self-identify as feminist researchers. Some may perceive this as an oxymoron, given that we align ourselves with the 'Psy-Sciences' (Kendall, 2000). As others before us have argued (e.g. Naffine, 1987), we believe feminism and empiricism can (and should) be integrated. What is perhaps a greater challenge is the consideration of feminist theories and implementation of feminist remedies within the paradox of an inherently oppressive (prison) environment. Despite this challenge, we maintain that it is the integration of various schools of thought that will facilitate the provision of the best gender-informed correctional interventions for girls and women. Accordingly, we believe that we have made a significant contribution to feminism, as well as criminological and psychological science, through the reconciliation of various paradigms in this book.