

Theorist: Freda Adler
Biographer: Melissa Hamilton

Links:

Biographical Information: <http://rutgers-newark.rutgers.edu/rscj/faculty/adler.cv.htm>
Outline of Theory: <http://www.d.umn.edu/~jhamlin1/adler.html>

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Freda Adler is currently a Distinguished Professor in Criminal Justice at Rutgers University. As President of the American Criminological Society for the 1994-1995 term, Dr. Adler is one of the few women who have held this post during the history of the organization. She has acted as a consultant to the United Nations on criminal justice matters since 1975 and has held numerous roles within United Nations organizations. A prolific writer, Dr. Adler has published in a variety of criminological areas, including female criminality, international issues in crime, drug abuse, and social control theories. The analysis presented herein regards, more specifically, Freda Adler's popular, yet distinguished thesis known generally as the liberation theory of female criminality.

INTRODUCTION

Freda Adler first gained prominence in 1975 by articulating a controversial theory in which she predicted rising crime rates for women as a result of the success of the women's liberation movement. In other words, the feministic social movement had increased women's opportunities, and thirst, for crime. A number of feminist commentators loudly panned the theory, while anti-feminists exploited the notion of increased female criminality to campaign for the social benefits of keeping women in the home. From a criminological viewpoint, Adler's thesis strongly contradicted the pathological explanations of female criminality prevalent in the preceding century. To emphasize how radical Adler's theory was at the time, this paper will first address the historical perspective of criminological theories regarding women and crime. Next is a summary of Adler's arguments and accompanying support. This is followed by a critical review of the liberation theory for female crime in the areas of research methodology, statistical analysis, and the overemphasis on the liberation movement's impact on the more common, lower-class women offenders. To conclude, this paper will address the current popularity of the liberation theory within feminist criminology.

BACKGROUND

Historically, female criminality has largely been a neglected area of criminological theory (Smart, 1976). Because women committed far fewer crimes, women as offenders were simply incorporated within the general theories of criminology. The fact that women, across most cultures, committed far fewer crimes than men was not seriously addressed. To understand female criminality, two general questions are salient. Why is there a large gap in the number and severity of crimes committed by men and women? For the relatively few women who do offend, what etiological theories are most applicable? The first theorists (Lombroso, 1895; Pollack, 1950) ascribed biological abnormalities as the basis for female criminality. Later, psychiatric explanations were popular, based on inherent female traits (Freud, 1933). Not until the second half of the twentieth century were social and environmental factors considered (Hoffman-Bustamante, 1973). Finally, the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s provided a new explanation for an alleged increase in female offending. With her timely text made popular in 1975, Freda Adler played a pivotal role in the

dramatic increase of interest in feminist criminology.

Biological Determinism

Until the latter part of the twentieth century, the few theorists who did specially address female criminals based their theories mostly on biological determinism. This focus of female crime was initially based on individual physiological or psychological characteristics of women, rather than on social or economic conditions within their environments. Perhaps the first scientist to address female criminality was the nineteenth century social statistician Adolphe Quetelet (1835). Quetelet posited that since women possessed half the physical strength of men, then the rate of women's violent offenses would comprise about half that of male violent crimes (cited in Adler & Simon, 1979:2). A similar theme was espoused in a study published in 1916, in which the author claims that women have less strength and courage than men and therefore commit fewer crimes (Bonger, 1916:478).

Lombroso's (1911) brand of biological criminality has been a strong influence on pathological reasoning in female criminality. Writing at the beginning of the century, Cesare Lombroso described criminal women as biologically dysfunctional. He believed that female deviants lacked maternal instincts, exhibited atavistic characteristics, and bore more masculine physical features, such as an excess of body hair. However, most women were incapable of deviant acts, Lombroso explained, because women were biologically inferior to men, more childlike, weak, and passive (Ibid.). He traced women's inherent meekness to the immobile nature of the ovum as compared to the more active sperm. Moreover, women were described as less evolved than men, closer to a primitive nature that would not allow degeneration into criminal propensity. Women exhibiting more masculine features would be less likely to be chosen as breeding mates (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895). When women did commit crime, those crimes were of a character that required little energy and forethought. Lombroso reasoned that women's physical and intellectual abilities were likewise inferior to those exhibited by men.

Sigmund Freud (1933) contributed his views about female criminality using psychiatric constructs. Freud believed that female deviance was rare. Anatomically inferior to men, women are described by Freud as being destined to the roles of wife and mother, culturally inferior positions matching her lesser abilities. By nature and by plan, Freud claims, women are incapable of rationale thought and, due to her inferiority complex, concerned with only marginal matters. Still, Freud gave an explanation for the few women who were criminals. For Freud, women commit antisocial acts in revenge for lacking a penis. A young girl's longing for the penis can turn to aggressive rebellion. Since that longing must be unrequited she naturally becomes neurotic, erroneously assuming more masculine traits. Thus, Freud's deviant woman is one who has wrongly adopted the wrong sex role, contrary to nature's intentions.

In 1950, Otto Pollak (1950) published his key work in the field of women and crime. In The Criminality of Women, Pollack blames female criminality on biological phases that undermine a woman's natural inhibitions and influence criminal offending. Under this theory, menstruation awakens feelings of irritation and complaint about her subordinate status in society. Pregnancy leads to irritation, anxiety, and emotional imbalance. Also, a menopausal woman becomes frightened about her emotional security and her marital well-being. Unlike Lombroso and Freud, though, Pollock believed that female criminality was more common than publicly acknowledged. Women's superb skills of deceit and concealment resulted in their deviant acts being largely undetected by others. Pollock explained that these skills were biologically driven with social reinforcement, as represented by the female's concealment of her monthly menstruation and her biological ability to misrepresent

her sexual enjoyment due to the invisibility of her orgasm.

Criticism of Deterministic Approaches

Critics of these early theorists on female criminality complained about their propensity to explain gender differences in offending in terms of women's sexuality (Smart, 1995:25). The sexist assumptions of the traditional male criminologists were also criticized for asserting that the female gender lacked rationality (Smart, 1976:29). Even as criminologists shifted towards sociological explanations for criminality, the field of female crime remained entrenched in biological explanations and the female's sexual inferiority. Contemporary theorists still occasionally return to explaining women offenders in terms of physiological and psychological factors inherent in the nature of women. Female criminals have been described as suffering from a chromosomal anomaly allowing them to overcome their natural weak and dependent characters (Cowie, Cowie, & Slater, 1968:170-171). Influenced by traditional liberal criminologists, theorists have also blamed female criminality on the psychological failings inherent in women. For example, one work discusses criminal behavior resulting from individual pathologies unique to women that may be constitutional, biological, and psychological in nature (Vedder & Sommerville, 1970). Another analysis attributes delinquency in young girls to emotional instability from their unfulfilled, inherent needs for dependency (Konopka, 1966:40-41). Blaming female deviance on women's inherent nature, necessarily indicating inferior nature and neurosis, is a notion that seems to endure over generations.

While the majority of earlier theory on female crime emphasized biological determinism and psychological factors, there were a few theorists who discussed social factors. Incorporating economic and societal concepts into the realm of female criminality expanded rapidly from the 1960s, as indicated by an increase in volume of literature on the topic. For example, female criminologists presented theories addressing the impact of differential gender roles on female criminality (Hoffman-Bustamante, 1973:132). Differences in socialization processes of girls and boys were likewise mentioned in explaining varying rates of delinquency (Morris, 1965). Notably, the rise of feminist social theory was a principle factor in the sudden public interest in women and crime.

Feminist Movements

The first expansive feminist movement in the United States ended successfully in 1920 with the Constitutional amendment granting women the right to vote. The second wave of feminism began in the 1960s with a platform based on women's equality. Feminists complained about the oppressive atmosphere in which women were treated inequitably in social, political, and economic realms. The movement promoted equal education and employment opportunities, curbs to employment discrimination, enhanced child-care, and reproductive freedom (Morris, 1987:68). In 1972, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives passed the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which would have mandated equality of rights regardless of gender, though the states eventually failed to ratify it. The liberation movement became an important topic in the nation's social agenda, drawing attention to women's issues, including that of criminality. Then established theories in the field of criminology were challenged as being male-centered ideologies created by men and reflexively generalized to the population (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988:505; Leonard, 1982). Theories regarding anomie, conflict, and differential association, may have explained lower-class male deviance, but mostly overlooked female crime (Weis, 1976:17).

Partly as a result of the push towards equality of the genders, more women entered the workforce and the political arena, reducing the gap between the genders in terms of power, pay, and social standing

(Adler, 1977:103). From 1950 to 1974, the number of women in the labor force almost doubled (cited in Mann, 1984:97). At the same time, The U.S. National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence issued a Staff Report publicly proclaiming that the gender gap in criminality was decreasing as cultural differences narrowed (Mulvihill, 1969). The media in the 1960s and 1970s highlighted images of a number of modern high profile, violent female offenders, including the Manson women, Patty Hearst and her female associates who were key strategists with the terrorist Symbionese Liberation Army, and other female terrorists around the globe (Klemesrud, 1978:A24; Weis, 1976:17; Adler, 1975b:112, 114). Accordingly, in an environment of social, not biological, change, physiological and psychological explanations for female criminality were no longer accepted as sufficient to explain the increase in rates of offending for women. It also seemed obvious that, contrary to earlier criminologists, women were capable of rational thought (Naffine, 1981:74), as illustrated by their increasing success in the workplace. Criminologists, mostly female, began to search beyond the primitive biological sexism of Lombroso for other explanations for female crime that could include sociological, political, and economic factors (Klein & Kress, 1979:82). The period of feminist empiricism began (Smart, 1995).

WANTED BY THE FBI



A pioneer in the recent feminist scholarship regarding female crime, Freda Adler (1975), published her seminal thesis, Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal, in 1975. Adler predicted increasing rates of female offending as a result of the emancipation of women and their growing participation in the workplace. Adler's work gained wide public attention for the field of female criminality, attracting both fans and critics. The notion of the new female criminal (Adler, 1975) resulting from women's liberation was irresistible.

THE LIBERATION THEORY

Adler credits the feminist movement with progressive changes in status for women in such arenas as the family, marriage, employment, and social position (Adler, 1975a:13). Previously, women had the same aspirations as men but, like an oppressed class, women lacked the power to obtain their goals by legitimate means. The road to success required women to seek status through men by conforming to the male definition of femininity. Women's liberation had altered these restrictions on women's behaviors and her opportunities. "Medical, educational, economic, political, and technological advances have freed women from unwanted pregnancies, provided them with male occupational skills, and equalized their strength with weapons" (Adler, 1975a:10).

Despite the gains provided women by liberation, Adler perceived a "darker side" to the movement

(Adler, 1975a:13). Just as women were charging forth into employment and economic opportunities, they were also pressing into crime. Competition with men in the legitimate workplace was matched by the female criminal's fight for her own niche in the criminal hierarchy. Women had become doctors, lawyers, soldiers, and stevedores. At the same time, women had become burglars, forgers, embezzlers, and terrorists (Adler, 1975b:42, Adler, 1977:102, 110; Klemesrud, 1978:A24). According to Adler, no longer confined to lesser crimes suiting the low ranks of the domestic women, a new breed of female criminal had emerged with aspirations and skills to engage in major crimes with higher rewards and notoriety.

Adler dismissed biological and psychological theories of prior criminologists as inadequate explanations of female criminality. While conceding the small natural differences between the genders, Adler insisted on the substantial impact of social forces on human behavior.

Of all the differences between the sexes, only four—size, strength, aggression, and dominance—have been implicated in any way with the overrepresentation of males in the criminal system. The first two are biologically givens; the other two are largely, if not entirely socially learned (Adler, 1975a:43).

For Adler, the socialization process had prevailed to institutionalize sex roles in which men and women confront far different expectations. Through social structuring and a complicated system of rewards and punishments, children had been shaped into their respective roles. Boys were given mechanical toys and encouraged to be tough and aggressive, while girls were treated as soft and cuddly beings. As children grew up, sex role patterns were bolstered with veiled threats of humiliation for nonconformance with societal expectations of masculinity and femininity. Adler felt that these social forces were more important in determining criminal behavior than whatever small biological differences might exist. Moreover, any disparities in physical strength and size that may have existed were ameliorated to some extent by technology and modern weapons (Adler, 1975).

Women's liberation, Adler envisaged, created new structural opportunities for women in crime. Embezzlement in the workplace was a prime example (Adler, 1977:103). Further, competition in the workplace required women to adopt certain traditional masculine characteristics, such as assertiveness, aggressiveness, and risk-taking. These same traits are associated with criminal offending. Thus, Adler characterized the rise of women offenders as connected to their newly acquired skills and masculine traits in an atmosphere of bright opportunity. Eschewing their roles as second-rate criminals, female criminals were said to be moving into more serious crimes. "In the same way that women are demanding equal opportunity in fields of legitimate endeavor, a similar number of determined women are forcing their way into the world of major crimes" (Adler, 1975:13). Adler assumed that women's needs and ambitions were similar to men since women are first human, then female. The more the position of women in society nears the position of men, then, the more alike their legitimate and criminal behavior became. Women, Adler noted, would naturally wish to emulate male patterns in criminality and would adopt masculine roles to do so (Adler, 1977:102).

Moving beyond theory, Adler claimed statistical evidence existed to prove that woman had already used their newly acquired opportunities to commit crime. Adler declared that female arrests for major crimes had "skyrocketed" since the 1960s (Adler, 1975b:42). Adler compared increases in rates of offending using FBI Uniform Crime Reports.

During the twelve-year period between 1960 and 1972 the number of women arrested for robbery rose by 277 per cent, while the male figure rose 169 per cent. Dramatic

differences are found in embezzlement (up 280 per cent for women, 50 per cent for men), larceny (up 303 per cent for women, 82% per cent for men), and burglary (up 168 per cent for women, 63 per cent for men) (Adler, 1975a:16).

Substantial increases in juvenile arrests for girls as compared to men during the same years yielded similar results (Adler, 1975b:48). In a later study, Adler compared rate increases between genders for crime in other countries between the 1960s and early 1970s, including England, Canada, Norway, Germany, Japan, India, and Poland (Adler, 1977). She found general support for her conclusion that female criminals were exceeding male criminals in percentage increases for almost every major crime. Adler did not find similar differences for murder and assault in the United States, with the rates for men and women being more comparable (Adler, 1975a). From this, Adler deduced that female offenders were primarily economically motivated and only secondarily violent.

Admitting that the typical female criminal was unlikely to identify herself with the liberation movement, Adler described a "new feminism". This, she explained, is a universal awareness among all levels of American women that they have more options, more control over their lives, and more ability to improve their socioeconomic status. Female criminals were impacted by the new feminism, Adler claimed, even if they deride the actual movement itself (Adler, 1975a).

Adler anticipated that the women's liberation movement had not yet reached its full effect in the latter 1970s. She envisioned the then current generation of young girls as maturing into an environment in which her equality in the social and working worlds was more fully realized. Through this course, psychological and social differences between men and women would steadily decline. Adler expected the same for gender variations in crime. Accordingly, Adler predicted:

If present social trends continue women will be sharing with men not only ulcers, coronaries, hypertension, and lung cancer (until recently considered almost exclusively masculine diseases) but will also compete increasing in such traditionally male criminal activities as crimes against the person, more aggressive property offenses, and especially white-collar crime (Adler, 1975a:252).

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Critics of Adler's liberation hypothesis have concentrated on three general areas of analysis: the misleading use of statistics, alternative explanations for female offending, and criticisms concerning certain assumptions underlying Adler's theory. The statistical problems concern Adler's choice of data, the analytic methods used, and the reliability of the interpretations gained therefrom. In the second area of analysis, criminologists have expressed alternative theories that do not include liberation as an independent factor to explain female offending and the gender gap in offending. Regarding the third general area of assessment, critics question the use of male criminals as the norm against which women offenders are measured and assumptions made about the breadth of the actual benefits derived from emancipation.

Empirical Faults

The statistical support for Adler's theory was based on a comparison of rates of offending among genders for the period 1960 to 1972 using U.S. Uniform Crime Report (UCR) arrest data (Adler, 1975a:15-16). There are a few problems with this approach. Because the occurrence of female crimes is relatively low compared to the overall rate of offending, even minor variations can easily

distort the percentage increase (Mukherjee & Fitzgerald, 1981:131; Forsyth, Roberts, & Gramling, 1993:29; Gwynn, 1993:100-101). Correspondingly, due to the large numbers of male offenders, dramatic increases in the numbers of male crimes would be required to show a similar significant percentage increase on a comparative basis (Smart, 1979:53).

Other studies reviewing crime statistics during the 1960s and 1970s have not supported Adler's suggestion that women were becoming more aggressive. One study found higher increases for female offending in property crimes from 1966 to 1975, with more violent crimes achieving lower increases or no changes (Norland & Shover, 1977:92-93). Another researcher found that while liberation may have increased adolescent girls' arrest rates in the types of crimes females had traditionally committed, such as petty property offenses and liquor violations, no such effect was seen in violent or serious crimes for the period 1965 to 1977 (Steffensmeier & Steffensmeier, 1980:80). Similar findings were presented in a study of arrest rates from 1960 to 1974 indicating that while female rates of property and drug offenses had been rising steadily (though female arrests were still only a small proportion of male arrests), no increases were seen for violent crimes that had no clear economic motive (Klein & Kress, 1979:85).

Adler's use of data covering a single 12-year period ending in 1972 to indicate the societal affect of a single social movement is likewise problematic. In the first place, without longitudinal data, one can only infer a relationship between the liberation movement and crime rates; causation would not be proven (Mukherjee & Fitzgerald, 1981:128). Moreover, the underlying implication of using a short period of time to prove a causal effect is that the same or similar increases in offending had not previously occurred. However, a number of social scientists discovered otherwise. Carol Smart (1979) found that female crimes against property with violence had increased 365 percent from 1935 to 1946 while larceny committed by females during the same period increased 68 percent (p:53). Another study compared rates of offending from 1949 to 1976 and found that while there was a marked increase in rates of female offending from 1959 to 1969, there was also a significant increase in the previous decade, 1949 to 1959, which could not be associated with the liberation movement (Gora, 1982:52).

Critics have also pointed out that the UCR increases in women's arrests outlined by Adler may be explained by factors other than women's increasing rights in the workplace. For example, it may not have been true that women were committing more offenses than in the past. Rather, changes in the criminal justice system itself may have intensified its attention to female criminals, resulting in increases in the arrest and charging of women (Mann, 1984:112). Some believe that the preexisting chivalrous attitude of the police and the paternalistic handling by judges toward women had eroded by the 1970s (Mann, 1984:112; Weis, 1976:19). Still, such systemic changes may have occurred partly as a result of the liberation movement itself, or more generally from the overall feminist calls for equality in treatment, including in the criminal justice arena.

As for her prediction of increased rates of offending over time, current analyses disprove such a notion. "Overall, the actual differences between male and female crime participation remain substantial and, in fact, appear to have stabilized in recent years" (LaGrange & Silverman, 1999:42). Conjecture about increased female involvement in white-collar crime has not materialized; women remain significant only in the area of petty theft (Naffine, 1987:95; Daly, 1989:790). As of 1994, women accounted for 1/3 of the arrests for larceny in the U.S., the highest percentage among all major categories of arrest (Simon, 1997:68-70). Still, the 1994 relative rate of female offending represented only a 2% increase since 1975. Otherwise, women accounted for not more than 16% of the arrests for all other property and violent types of offenses (Simon, 1997:68-70). The per capita rate of murders

by women in 1998, steadily declining since 1980, was the lowest since 1976 (Greenfield & Snell, 1999). Furthermore, female offenders, even those who have committed serious crimes, continue to be much less likely than men to continue in a criminal career (Steffensmeier & Allen, 1996:464).

Alternative Explanations

A number of theorists have offered alternative explanations for the trends in female offending. For example, one study found that traditional theories of social control and differential association explained increases in adolescent marijuana use, without requiring gender-specific explanations (Smith & Paternoster, 1987:136). The lower rates of female offending has been explained by gender differences in self control and opportunity; males reported less self-control than women while women were commonly subject to a greater degree of supervision than men (LaGrange & Silverman, 1999). General strain theory has been proposed in particular to explain the increased property crime offending by lower income women, who are aware of the potential opportunities for success but find themselves unable to achieve their goals (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). Commonly, similar economic motivations and marginalization are theorized as very important in shaping female criminals' careers (Mann, 1984:98; Daly, 1989:789). Another study, testing an integrated strain-liberation theory in which it was hypothesized that strain would be greater among liberated females, found that the evidence failed to distinguish between strain effects on liberated and unliberated women (Leiber, Farnworth, Jamieson, & Nalla 1994:64). Also important are other social changes and factors occurring during the liberation movement that could have as significant an impact in changing sex roles, such as the antiwar movement of the 1960s (Gora, 1982:82), the prevailing high divorce rates, and the growing number of single mother households (Steffensmeier & Allen, 1996:470).

Erroneous Assumptions

Adler's theory that women are becoming more like men has been criticized for its underlying assumption that men are considered the norm against which women are measured and studied (Naffine, 1996:35-36). According to Adler, women were endeavoring to be more like men, to emulate them, and to seek their same opportunities and risks. This approach seems to marginalize women as their own gender (Cain, 1990:11). In terms of white-collar crime, Kathleen Daly (1989:790-791) suggests that the interrelationship between gender, class, and race factors within and without occupations be examined, without the mistake of simply comparing women's white-collar crime against men's. The comparison to men and masculinity as factors in aggressiveness and aggressive crime suggests a tautology by inferring an aggressive nature from a female offender's commission of a violent crime (Norland & Shover, 1977:99). However, research has not shown that women have actually become more violent or aggressive in nature since the liberation movement.

Similarly, it has been shown that women's increased entry into the workplace has not resulted in the vast gains and equality in their social status portrayed by Adler (Morris, 1987:71-72). The preponderance of working women remains in low-paying, low status jobs (Boritch & Hagan, 1990:569). There is also some evidence that women's economic status had actually deteriorated between the 1960s and 1980s (Mann, 1984:98). Together with statistics that the largest gains in female crime are in the area of property crimes (Steffensmeier & Steffensmeier, 1980:80), it seems more plausible to relate increases in female offending to her greater financial pressures than to any improved economic or social status (Chesney-Lind, 1997:115). In this same vein, the typical female offender is not one who received the main benefits from the liberation movement. Women criminals generally are uneducated, unskilled, and commit small property crimes (Gwynn, 1993). The liberation movement advantageously impacted mainly white, middle-class women (Mukherjee & Fitzgerald,

1981:135). Thus, the liberation theory tends to ignore class and race differences among women, in favor of a simplistic male/female role dichotomy (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988:511).

Likewise, studies have found no support for the proposition that women who embrace more liberated roles are more likely to offend than their more traditionally-oriented counterparts. Thus, in testing sex-role expectations, researchers have found that women who advocated liberated sex roles were not likely to seek equal opportunities in crime (Leventhal, 1977:1181; McCord & Otten, 1983:10). A study of juvenile delinquents found that masculinity expectations of others were not associated with the frequency of delinquency by girls (Thornton & James, 1979:234). Female prisoners also tended to convey their belief in more traditionally female and conservative values than control groups (Morris, 1987:70). Yet anomie theory may offer a counter argument to the foregoing to explain the increase in offending by lower-class women as opposed to middle-class females. Anomie theory posits that the lower-class populace may be enticed by middle-class values without the concomitant opportunities to achieve them. Having been introduced to the emancipation tenets of improved employment opportunity and raised social status purportedly available to all women, lower-class women may be unable to find those opportunities and consequently reject those as middle-class norms. This rejection may lead to crime as a mechanism of coping (Austin, 1982:411).

The final complaint to be discussed here concerns how the liberation hypothesis for female offending can, and allegedly has been, used to harm the underlying intentions of women's rights. Some speculate that the media attention given to the notion that women's liberation leads to female crime gives unwarranted ammunition to conservative and reactionary powers to argue that female emancipation produces moral decay and societal disarray (Smart, 1976:75-76, Smart, 1979:58; Pearson, 1997:229). The liberation theory discredits the movement by suggesting that women who conform to feminine sex roles are more legitimate as female offenders than those who do not (Weis, 1976:17). Also, the liberation thesis is said to misdirect, confuse, and retard research into female criminality (Feinman, 1979:137; Steffensmeier & Allen, 1996:471). Nonetheless, one commentator has dismissed these arguments since, even if it were proven that the liberation movement resulted in increased female criminality, one cannot presume to judge the overall value of the movement without weighing the other benefits derived from liberation (Austin, 1982:428).

CURRENT TREATMENT

The liberation theory of increased female offending is no longer as popular in the latter 1990s as it was in the previous two decades. This may be due in part to the fact that women did not make significant gains in equality with men in all the areas that Adler had suggested, most particularly with low rates in aggressive offenses and white collar crime. It is commonly suggested, too, that the goals and effects of emancipation are still far from being fully achieved as women still lag far behind than men in terms of equality in the workplace, in social status, and in economic fitness (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996).

Nonetheless, liberation ideology continues to be linked intermittently to distinct patterns of violent crime and to female gang activity. In the inner cities of America, violent street crime by women has been viewed as an adaptation to the same economic and social deprivation factors as impacting men who offend (Baskin, Sommers, & Fagan, 1993:414). In addition, liberation is used as a catchword by feminists to scold women into accepting responsibility for their actions, even their criminal exploits, and to chastise the criminal justice system for perceiving women solely as victims and for not holding female offenders accountable (Pearson 1997:232). It has been suggested that the concept of liberation is more strongly related to increases in female violence if we view liberation in terms of its allowing women to embrace her own sexual freedom, rather than due to any economic equality

(Hanna, 1999:109).

Even if the scientific analysis underlying the liberation theory has been proven fallacious, the debate has led criminologists to other avenues of research. Thus, Adler's influence remains evident in research during the 1990s. For example, John Hagan's power-control theory incorporating concepts of delinquency with egalitarian families is linked to assumptions about gender-equality (cited in Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996:468). Another effort tested an integrated theory borrowing aspects from the liberation theory and from the mainstream strain theory (Leiber, Farnworth, Jamieson, & Nalla, 1994). A number of studies continue to discuss gender differences in crime as related to expanded situational opportunities for women to offend (LaGrange & Silverman, 1999). Likewise, by focusing on the increase of women in the workplace, attention has then been directed toward the diminishing role of women in the home, thereby reducing the role of domestic women in providing informal social controls for children (Gwynn, 1993:101).

Still a more interesting use of Adler's theory has been employed toward an explanation of male criminality. The men's movement in the 1990s, often associated with such groups as the Promise Keepers, advocates the male's return as the titular head of the household, encouraging man to welcome his manhood. This has prompted some to argue that the same general masculinity concepts as applied by Adler for female criminality are the reasons men commit more crime and evidence more violent behavior (Stoeltje, 2000).

Most important, Adler's liberation theory remains an important milestone in attracting attention to female criminality as a specialty to be addressed within criminological theory. She encouraged significant growth in the study of women offenders and the need for a related, more female gender-oriented empirical analysis. In any discourse on feminist criminal theory, Adler's name and her unique theory continue to be commonly mentioned and discussed. She is referred to on occasion as a pioneer who generated publicity for a topic previously much ignored (Morrison, 1995:183; Naffine, 1987:89). Finally, throughout the subsequent criticism and the opposing theories about female criminality, there remains heated debate among a multitude of various biological, environmental, and socio-economic theorists concerning the underlying questions. As women have gained status with respect to men in important social and professional arenas, why does there still exist such a wide chasm between the crime rates for men and women? Are gender-neutral theories (or as some suggest, male-normed theories) truly adequate explanations for why a small portion of women commits criminal acts? The answers to these deceptively simple questions remain elusive.