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Book Review

Renzetti Claire (2013) *Feminist Criminology*. London, UK: Routledge.

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Feminist Criminology, a recent addition to the suite of slimline *Key Ideas in Criminology Series* (Routledge), captures and retrospectively unpacks the complexity, diversity and essence of feminist criminology. Claire Renzetti provides a rich, engaging and thought-provoking account, taking the reader on a journey encompassing the historical, legal, sociological and psychological dimensions that examine the context, synergies and disjunctions among past, present and future feminist criminologies. Her unique approach considers the micro and macro dimensions of, and impact within, the discipline, academy, criminal justice system and society more broadly.

Emphasising the fluidity underpinning feminist perspectives, Renzetti contends that 'there is no single unitary perspective in criminology', with feminist criminology offering 'a diverse collection of theoretical perspectives and methods' (p. 99). Opting for the path less travelled and rejecting the marginalising of feminist criminology with the notional 'add and stir' approach, Renzetti advocates moving beyond a tolerance approach to one that embeds analyses of gender, 'race' and class within mainstream criminological research paradigms. Charting the development of feminist criminology from the 1970s to the present, Renzetti offers 'an assessment of criminology's potential for shaping the future of our discipline' and the practice of criminal justice (p. 1). *Feminist Criminology* is organised into five chapters, each progressing concise summaries of feminist approaches, contributions to criminological practice, and shifting academic landscapes; the text concludes with an appraisal of future directions for feminist criminology.

Chapter One provides a brief overview of historical feminist thought, activism and the diversity of feminism as a paradigm for explaining social relations, and tracks feminist engagement with criminology from 1970s to the present. Chapter Two continues the retrospective journey, focusing on liberal feminist criminology and the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in gender discrimination legislation and the mandating of equal rights for men and women in employment, education, government, the legal system and other social institutions in the West. Chapter Three builds on this by exploring the conceptual shift towards framing oppression as an outcome of patriarchy (gender inequality and sexism).

Far from being the 'kitchen sink' chapter (p. 50), Chapter Four cleverly addresses intersectionality and includes a focus on postmodern and multiracial perspectives. As she does in the preceding chapters, Renzetti helpfully unpacks the impact and significance of these

perspectives for criminology, criminal justice, and the academy. In the fifth and final chapter, Renzetti considers the future of feminist criminology, and identifies four key priorities that are in need of 'deeper and more vigorous scratching' (p. 74) to progress a global feminist criminology further. Identified areas in need of feminist criminological critique include: gender-specific criminal justice programming (that is, empirical evaluation of gender-specific programs including those for battered women); terminology around 'gender responsive' programs; restorative justice measures and the positioning of women as perpetrators as well as victims; and the need to globalise feminist criminology and recognise the limitations manifest in Western feminist criminological scholarship.

In addition to providing an overview of feminist criminology's contributions, challenges and limitations, Renzetti poses provoking questions relating to the academy, criminal justice and legal professions, and women's career pathways and progression. She argues that, in the near future, women will constitute the majority of criminology and criminal justice faculty members and contextualises this prediction with research that demonstrates the complexities of how gender and 'race' significantly impact on women's academic productivity. A significant impact on career progression is that women devote more time to teaching, supporting students, and committee work, at the expense of their research and publication profile. Renzetti flags the importance of mentors as a key strategy for women academics to navigate their career planning. Focusing on curriculum design and content, Renzetti poses the question 'To what extent is the curriculum infused with feminist criminology?' (p. 80). She identifies the 'importance of feminist criminology to the criminology and criminal justice curriculum' and contends that the onus is on the academy to meet these demands. Progressing this thread, Renzetti presents a confronting picture of law enforcement (policing and legal profession) dominated by the norms of hegemonic masculinity – despite increasing numbers of female officers – and draws on research indicating growing structural resistance to women's and minorities' presence within the legal profession.

For Renzetti, feminist criminology remains silenced and, if visible, located on the fringe of mainstream criminology, a point well demonstrated in her discussion of *The Future of Criminology* (Loeber and Welsh 2012) 'where the phrase feminist criminology does not appear in any of the 33 chapter titles' (p. 87). Renzetti sees this as symptomatic of the continuing marginalisation of feminist criminology within the discipline as a whole. *Feminist Criminology* seeks to address this marginalisation. It is well structured and written with an engaging tone and easy style, unlike many other criminology tomes. Concise descriptions of the characteristics of feminist criminological theory are provided and embedded within their emerging contexts. Renzetti uses many powerful examples to demonstrate the ways in which research frames realities structured through social interactions. A strong evidence base is demonstrated and underpinned by a depth and breadth of international research examples, key texts, and summaries of benefits and critiques, followed by discussions of the impact of theory at micro and macro levels. This approach provides a balanced perspective and is imbued with key feminist principles as Renzetti traverses the differences and complexities in providing general overviews of key aspects of feminist criminology perspectives with great tact. One such example is her disclaimer that '... I undertake this attempt to offer a simplified, general overview of postmodern feminist criminology fully aware that I am unlikely to please or satisfy many criminologists, especially postmodern criminologists of any stripe' (p. 61).

The interdisciplinary nature of the research canvassed by Renzetti makes this book relevant and valuable to a range of disciplines (that is, scholars in crime and justice, public policy, and social work). It also provides Higher Degree Research students (potential and current) and their supervisors, as well as new and experienced researchers, a solid platform from which to engage with feminist methodology and feminist theory. Renzetti unpacks the theoretical terminology, the semantics behind what it means to be a feminist criminologist, and engages a diversity of

readers who could be located within, or outside, the criminology domain. As an early career academic and feminist researcher, engaging with this text was reaffirming to my practice.

Feminist Criminology is an excellent resource and a wonderful reflection of the plurality of feminist approaches – the achievements and challenges, past, present and future – that feminist criminology faces. Renzetti has achieved her goal of providing a comprehensive understanding of the ‘diverse perspectives and methods that are feminist criminology’ providing a resource that is ‘useful for doing their jobs – be it students of criminology and as criminologists – whatever those jobs may be’ (p. 99).

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References

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