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If media reports of women's crime are a measure of societal attitudes, then it is clear that women as offenders continue to interest, fascinate and appal the public. There is a general public concern in many Western countries at the perceived increase in violent crime perpetuated by women and, in particular, young women (Brown, Chesney-Lind & Stein, 2013). The role of the media in fuelling this concern has increasingly come to be questioned. At the time of writing this chapter, yet another media item had caught the headlines in New Zealand: 'Younger, more violent women behind bars' (Neale, 2012), a headline that may well increase levels of anxiety surrounding women offenders. The way that crime is reported in the media, however, may not only influence public perceptions of crime but may play a role in shaping responses to offenders (see Chapter 4). In this chapter, we review the reporting of women's offending from the perspective of two jurisdictions: Aotearoa New Zealand and the state of Victoria in Australia. For our analysis, we collected media reports of criminal offending over a three-month period in early 2011. Informed by the comparisons we identified, we relate this to current debates in feminist criminology.

A number of feminist writers have contended that a new theory of women's crime is necessary (for example, Chesney-Lind, 2006; Hannah-Moffat, 2009; Klein, 1995; Smart, 1976). The rationale for this belief is that traditional criminological theories have been developed based on observations and research about male offenders and male offending. Feminist writers argue that such traditional theories are inadequate to explain women's experiences and the gendered factors that influence their offending.

Our view is that knowledge does not exist in a vacuum and that it is inevitable that collective understandings or discourses about crime based on
historical origins will inform theories and ideas about women's crime in the contemporary context (Foucault, 1977). We contend that theories about women's crime need to take both deductive and inductive approaches. A deductive approach allows traditional theories of crime to be considered in the light of the feminist critique, and tests their applicability to women. A number of criminologists have taken this perspective in testing strain theory (Broidy & Agnew, 1997) and control theory (Booth, Farrell & Varano, 2008; Proctor, 2004). An inductive approach, based primarily on qualitative research, can allow the unique voices of women offenders to be heard and new theories that may help to explain their offending to be generated (Bloom & Covington, 2001). Qualitative research can assist in exploring women's reported experiences of criminal justice arrangements.

An inductive, qualitative approach can also explore populist and community understandings of crime to account for individual, societal and political responses to crime committed by women. Many writers have attested to the link between public sentiment, media coverage and public policy (Mason, 2007; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007; Pratt & Clark, 2005; Wayne, Henderson, Murray & Petley, 2008). A number of feminist writers have also argued that media representations of women and crime continue to reflect and determine ongoing attitudes toward female offenders that, in turn, influence societal responses (Davies, Francis & Greer, 2007; Millibank, 2004; Singer, Bussey, Song & Lunghofer, 1995). These writers take a wider perspective, which considers the discursive climate and its effects in terms of how a criminalised person's identity is constructed by her or himself and others and the impact this has on behaviour as well as on criminal justice and other policy. This mutually constituting influence is rarely acknowledged by traditional modernist theories of crime, which seek to locate the problem of crime within the offender alone (Goldingay, 2009).

We begin this chapter by reviewing a selection of key theories concerning women and crime and then go on to describe some of the key findings from our analysis of the media reports we have collected from newspaper resources in New Zealand and the state of Victoria. We consider the impact of media reporting on public attitudes toward criminalised women and on legal and correctional policies with respect to these. We then compare the ideas about women's crime that are expressed in these news stories in order to reflect on how these relate to prevailing theories about criminalised women. We conclude by interpreting these comparisons in the light of the implications of the complex interplay between gender, ethnicity, socio-political vested interests, populist sentiment and the media on women and women offenders.
Statistics on women’s imprisonment in New Zealand and the state of Victoria, Australia

The most recent data available on women’s imprisonment in New Zealand is contained in the Offender Volumes Report 2009 (Department of Corrections, 2010). The report shows that between June 1986 and June 2009 the female offender sentenced population increased from 4% of all prisoners to 5.9% of all prisoners. There were 98 female offenders in prison in June 1986 compared with 389 in June 2009, an increase of 297%. In the same period, the male offender population grew from 2359 to 6157, an increase of 161%. The number of sentenced offenders, therefore, increased significantly during this period, with the female population growing more rapidly than that of male prisoners. There are other important trends in the data, particularly with regard to ethnicity. For many years there has been a major disparity between the proportion of Māori female offenders in prison and that of Pākehā (European) females. An earlier report, Over-representation of Māori in the Criminal Justice System (Department of Corrections, 2007), showed that 60% of female prisoners and 50% of male prisoners were of Māori ethnicity. According to the Offender Volumes Report 2009, there were twice as many 25-year-old Māori males in prison compared with Pākehā males of that age group, while young Māori females constituted the largest single group of females in prison. A ‘snapshot’ of numbers of young women aged 14 to 19 years in 2010 showed that 30 out of the 41 in that age group identified as Māori.* That Māori are over-represented in the criminal justice system is clear when you compare these figures with those of the 2006 Census (Statistics New Zealand, 2006), which reveal Māori constitute 14.6% of the New Zealand population overall.

According to the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2010) in the state of Victoria the proportion of Australian indigenous peoples was significantly lower than in other states, at only 0.7% of the general population. Between 2006 and 2010, while there was a greater increase in the rate of female prisoners in Victoria (27.8%) than male prisoners (15%), the number of indigenous females as a percentage of total female prisoners also increased from 6.5% to 9.4% (Department of Justice, 2010). These figures are significant given the 0.7% overall indigenous population in the region.

The increase in the prison population is of wide concern, particularly the ethnic disparities and the growth of women prisoner numbers. The impact of incarceration on indigenous people and communities is also of considerable concern. This includes, but is not limited to, alienation from country,

* Personal communication, Senior Research Advisor, Department of Corrections, 2 March 2012.
culture, family and friends, subsequent stigma, breakdown of relationships and the loss to the community of those incarcerated, the mothers, aunties, grandmothers, sisters and daughters, who are missed and mourned by those communities. As Hogg (2001) has concluded, imprisonment leads to 'dislocation, marginalisation and criminalisation' (p. 358). Therefore, the challenge for researchers, policymakers and our respective communities is to extend existing understandings of the process of criminalisation and consider the broader context within which women's crime occurs. This may help to move beyond existing 'what works' frameworks that are based on more individualist foci on the criminalised person and the risk of reoffending and that have been developed from research with male offenders (Beals, 2004).

Theories of crime and the feminist critique
There is a growing body of knowledge about women and crime that has developed over the last 30 years. This work has been prompted by the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, which challenged mainstream criminology to demonstrate the relevancy of theories proposed by men and for men to the experiences of women (Davies et al., 2007; Naffine, 1997). It is not intended in this chapter to provide a full account of criminological theory. Rather, our aim is to provide a précis of major shifts in thinking and their relevance for explaining women and crime.

Traditional, classical theories of crime emerged at the time of utilitarianism and the liberal tradition in the 19th century and focused on the idea of the rational man and how a man might weigh the consequences of his actions (Cullen & Agnew, 2010). Imprisonment as the prevailing means of punishment grew in this period based on deterrence and the principle of less eligibility (Sieh, 1989).* The positivists in the early 20th century subscribed to determinative theories based on individual and social attributes (Cullen & Agnew, 2010). One of the early positivists, Pollak (1950), proposed that females were capable of feigning sexual pleasure and, therefore, more capable of crimes of deception than males. Classical theorists ignored the possibility of women making rational choices, whereas the early positivists converted female criminality into individual pathology and biological deviancy.

Sociological explanations for male crime from the mid to late 20th century took a more ecological and environmental approach to theory. Merton's (1957) development of strain theory and the tendency for some men to achieve

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* Sieh (1989) describes the central tenet of this principle, which proposes that in order to deter criminals, prison conditions should be harsher than the poorest working conditions.
conventional goals by illegal means ignored the possibility that women may not share the same conventional motivations as men. More recent writing has sought to address this; Broidy and Agnew's (1997) work, for example, on revised strain theory recognises the role of gender in motivation to commit crime. There are many sociological theories, such as subcultural theory (Cohen, 1955), and control theories (Hirschi, 2002), the former dealing with the influence of criminal associations and the latter with attachment to conventional relationships, which have progressed the ecological understanding of male crime.

The sociological theories discussed so far fall broadly under the heading of consensus theories of crime in that they are all underpinned by an assumption of societal agreement about what might cause offending behaviour. In addition to consensus theories, however, there is a body of thinking that can be classified as conflict theories. Conflict theories are underpinned by an assumption that societal arrangements can be characterised by constant conflict over power and control. Powerful groups with vested interests are able to define what constitutes criminal behaviour and design punishment systems that advantage some sections of the population more than others. Marxist principles concerning inequality and social injustice underpin conflict theory. Criminologists, such as Young (1999), have analysed how discrimination and class conflict produce criminal law and penal systems that disadvantage and marginalise the poor in our communities.

Feminist criminology has emerged from this more contemporary critical tradition and sought to explain why so many more men than women were incarcerated, and why so many more women than men were victimised (Carlen, 1988; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Hannah-Moffat, 2009; Naffine, 1997; Smart, 1976). The feminist critique of mainstream criminology has argued that assumptions made about the motivations and causes of men's offending cannot necessarily be transposed to women.

Critical criminologists argue that the heavy reliance of Western correctional systems on actuarial methods of assessing risk of re-offending (Pratt & Clark, 2005; Ward & Maruna, 2007) has led to a system of self-fulfilling prophecy where arrest and apprehension practices, coupled with risk assessment based on history of offending, inevitably result in already marginalised populations being over-represented in the criminal justice system. Indigenous women and women from some ethnic minorities are no exception when it comes to disparities in sentencing and incarceration practices internationally (Hannah-Moffat, 2009). From a critical perspective, the increase in the number of women in prison can be attributed to socio-economic impacts on women.
in poverty and the criminalisation of women dependent on state security benefits (Gustafson, 2009).

Women, crime and the media
There is a paucity of writing and research on women, crime and the media. Heidensohn (1996) has stated that, due to the fact that women’s violent offending is comparatively rare, it arouses the public interest. More recent writers, particularly from the United States, have explored whether media reporting has an influence on practices within criminal justice systems. Boulahanis and Heltsley (2004), for example, found that newspaper coverage of crime in Chicago tended to over-report more unusual and extreme types of offending, particularly juvenile homicide, as well as ‘cases involving females, Caucasians, and extremely young victims and offenders’ (p.132). While the study was undertaken at a time when the homicide rates were declining, this was not the impression gained from newspaper reports. The type of reporting also appeared to influence public perceptions by increasing the fear of crime in those who relied on newspapers for access to crime information. The results of Dowler’s (2003) research, which covered a wider range of cities within the United States, were more equivocal, but he did find that exposure to media reports of crime led to an increase in the fear of crime and to increased punitive reactions. In another study, Pollak and Kubrin (2007) analysed articles from the Washington Post and found that ‘although youth are much less likely to commit crime and to be victimised compared to adults, their stories are disproportionately “the stuff of the news”’ (p. 59). They suggest that ‘news reporting follows the law of opposites – the characteristics of crime, criminals, and victims represented in the media are in most respects the polar opposite of the pattern suggested by official crime statistics’ (p. 59). In New Zealand, recent media commentary has observed that half of the child abuse cases in New Zealand involve Pākehā offenders, but news reports focus on cases where Māori families are responsible (Harvey, 2012).

In line with critical criminological theory, critical media or crime writers argue that the media reflects powerful vested interests in our society and media reporting tends to support these interests (Myers, 2004). This can lead to more draconian criminal justice measures (Mason as cited in Mason, 2007). Myers (2004) reports that the news rarely covers violence against African American women ‘unless it is sensationalistic or highly unusual’ (p. 97). Noh, Lee and Feltey (2010) found that where ‘battered women who kill’ were reported in newspapers in Canada and the United States, they were presented as either cold-blooded murderers or mentally ill, not as rational people responding to
a particular set of circumstances. This portrayal tends to reinforce traditional stereotypes of women offenders as either mad or bad (Noh et al., 2010).

Our own analysis of newspaper reports over a three-month period in New Zealand and the state of Victoria, Australia, illustrate some of the issues highlighted by media crime researchers. The New Zealand newspaper reports, from a compilation of urban daily newspapers, were collected from the Stuff website (www.stuff.co.nz). The website has a regular crime reporting section which frequently continues to report the same crime, especially if extreme or unusual forms of violence are involved. The reports cover crime that has not yet been solved as well as specific court cases. Of the 82 separate offences reported on the Stuff website from February to April 2011, 114 male offenders and 13 female offenders were involved.

Analysis of these findings suggests that readers in New Zealand would gain the impression that there is considerable violence in their communities and that much of this violence is extreme. In the article ‘Younger, more violent women behind bars’, the journalist proposes that numbers of young women inmates have increased and that their crimes are increasingly violent ones. No mention is made, in this or other reports, of the consistent gender disparity, in relation to violence, and clearly there appears to be an ongoing perception that violence by young women is a growing problem. This inconsistency is worthy of further exploration. It is possible that the more the public come to regard young women as more likely to be dangerous, the more punitive our community responses are likely to be.

In the state of Victoria, media coverage of crime was also analysed during the three-months of our study period, February to April 2011. Two daily newspapers were chosen to represent the different type of audience the papers were aimed at: the Herald Sun, which could be considered a tabloid-type newspaper, and The Age, which is aimed at a more educated or intellectual audience. We used the search term ‘women and crime’ to locate articles. The Herald Sun articles were accessed through NewsText (http://www.newstext.com.au/pages/main.asp) while the Age articles were accessed through the newspaper’s website (www.theage.com.au). Five Herald Sun articles were located. Four reported crimes of violence: one involved a male against a female, one a male against a child and two a female against a male. A striking difference was found between the reporting of the female and male-initiated offences. For example, moral judgements were included in reports concerning female crime with headlines such as, ‘Women on the rampage’, and ‘Kinky sex led to killing’, whereas those concerning male crime, ‘Woman, 86, assaulted’ and ‘For Xxxx, justice at last’, only reported the facts, such as ages, locations and
times. In the report headed ‘Flood looting charges’, the moral failings of the two young men who stole from flood victims were not highlighted. On the other hand, in the report headed ‘Woman on the rampage’, the ‘inexplicability’ and ‘inexcusability’ of the crime were highlighted and portrayed as the reason for the particularly harsh sentence. The report focused on what was considered by some to be the failings of the woman in question, including her drug use and multiple pregnancies. In the report headed ‘Kinky sex led to killing’, the emphasis was on the jurors’ decision that there was no reasonable basis for the defendant’s belief that she was acting in self-defence, despite details of the prolonged and significant abuse and denigration the woman had experienced at the hands of the male she eventually attacked and killed.

Seven articles were retrieved from The Age website using the search term ‘women and crime’, and these were significantly different in tone from those in the Herald Sun. Two were discounted as they covered entertainment and fashion, not actual crime. The remaining five articles involved critiques of the prevailing socio-political system. These included sexual exploitation, under the headline ‘Sex abuse in the military’; racism and exploitation of vulnerable immigrants by migration agents, ‘Visa agents involved in sex trade’ and landlords, ‘Cul de sac of broken dreams’; and punitive responses to women’s crime, ‘Pressure on women’s jails’. There was also an article that discussed whether or not graffiti should be viewed as an art form or a crime, with the headline ‘The writing on the wall’. Thus, the reports published in The Age could be said to be critiquing oppressive societal systems, as opposed to those in the Herald Sun, which appeared to take a punitive view of marginalised groups, especially women who offend.

An examination of patterns of media crime reporting in daily newspapers across two similar jurisdictions, New Zealand and the state of Victoria, revealed both similarities and differences. General analysis revealed a disproportionate number of male violent offenders. Reports from both regions relating to female offenders also tended to include judgemental and moral criticisms; this is in keeping with the findings of feminist criminologists (for example, Davies et al., 2007; Millibank, 2004; Singer et al., 1995). In Victoria there is a difference in the reporting style of the two main newspapers. The articles in The Age newspaper, aimed at a ‘discerning audience’, offer critiques of the dominant views of marginalised groups, enabling a less emotive and punitive discussion than those in the Herald Sun, a tabloid-type newspaper. In reporting women’s crime, the articles in the Herald Sun tended to be overlaid with moral judgement, even when the crime was in response to prolonged abuse. A number of writers have commented that in such tabloid papers, ‘inequality is naturalised
by making the material conditions of working class invisible and by belittling and marking as hypervisible the socially unacceptable characteristics of certain members of the working class' (Richardson, 2007, p. 142).

As discussed in the academic literature, it is likely that a mutually constituting process of public opinion and marketing in both New Zealand and Australia will influence the media in its reporting of crime. It is also likely that both readers and journalists reflect a societal tendency to judge female offenders more harshly due to stereotyped expectations about women's behaviour. As long as these attitudes remain uncontested in New Zealand, the needs of criminalised women will not be a priority either in the form of service provision for their specific treatment needs or funding for research that can identify the contributing factors to their offending and how these might be mitigated (Beals, 2004). In the absence of services and research, the harsh sentences women receive that fail to take the context of their offending into account will continue, leading to ongoing marginalisation, social alienation and dislocation. In addition, as noted, the number of young women (aged 14–19) as a group of offenders is increasing, yet young women in prison also continue to be deprived of services and programmes to meet their specific needs (Goldingay, 2009). Anthropologist Donna Swift, in her recent study on the violent and antisocial behaviour of young girls, has noted, 'It's really entrenched in our society that girls are sweet, and nice and kind and when they step over the line, we come down pretty hard on them' (as cited in Neale, 2012).

**Conclusion**

In the current environment, female imprisonment rates and particularly female indigenous imprisonment rates continue to rise in both New Zealand and Australia. Investigation into perceptions of, and responses to, this increase across the two countries, therefore, is of interest to further inform our understanding of the phenomena. While deductive approaches to understanding crime consider various traditional criminological theories to account for rising crime rates, the majority of these approaches assume a deficit within individual offenders. More recent inductive approaches, based on qualitative research methods, are able to generate new theories to help explain the rise in imprisonment rates and move beyond theories about 'what works', which tend to locate the responsibility for rising crime rates within individual offenders alone. Of particular value are theories that critique the societal structures that give rise to unequal treatment by the justice system, the welfare system and even the media, all of which impact on the treatment female and indigenous offenders.
receive by criminal justice systems. Media in New Zealand compound stereotypes, describing violence within indigenous communities as ‘rampant’, and crime committed by young women as reaching ‘out of control’ proportions.

Similar processes can be seen in Victoria, Australia, where during the three-month period of our analysis articles about crime committed by women included moral judgements and character denigration not observed in articles concerning crime committed by men. Nevertheless, while some reporting in Victoria focused on punitive responses and stereotyping this was offset by the presence of media reporting with a more critical stance to approaching social issues. Despite this, and the seemingly less punitive media coverage overall, Victorian Department of Justice figures continue to demonstrate an increasing rate of imprisonment of women and indigenous Australians within the state. Further exploration is warranted, therefore, in relation to the complex interplay between socio-political vested interests, ethnicity, gender, populist sentiment and the media, and their connection with the increasing rates of imprisonment of women and indigenous peoples across New Zealand and Australia.

Questions
• Do you agree that there has been an increase in the extent and type of women’s criminal offending in recent years?
• What responsibility do you think journalists should have in reporting women’s offending?
• Given what you know about changes in society in recent years, how much part do you think media has had to play in these changes?
• Why do you think there has been an increase in punishments for women in recent decades?

Further reading