Feminist Perspectives in Criminology: A Review with Gen Y in Mind

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What does *feminism* mean to Generation Y? Born in affluent western nations between 1980 and 1992, Gen Y is in their late teens and twenties, the age range of those reading texts like this. A UK study suggests that for Gen Y members, 'the cultural and economic enfranchisement of women is deep rooted and irreversible', and Gen Y men and women hold similar attitudes 'not only to work and politics but even to feminism itself' (Wynter, 2006, p. 145, quoting Demos Foundation). In fact, many (most?) Gen Y women do not call themselves feminists. I am confronted, then, with a problem: what does a chapter on feminist perspectives in criminology mean to readers for whom feminism or feminist perspectives are viewed as irrelevant?

Another way to view the situation is to assume that popularised versions of feminist ideas have already been absorbed by Gen Y. For that reason, young women have no need to join a social movement or to brand their ideas a certain way. This phenomenon holds for criminology: popularised versions of feminist ideas and concepts have seeped into common knowledge. Students generally understand and appreciate the circumstances of partner and sexual violence; they realise that many offenders have also been victimised; and they are aware of the double standard of treatment for male and female prisoners. These ideas, which are commonplace today, were new 35 years ago, when they were first introduced by feminist movement activists and academics. Since then, more sophisticated theories have been put forward by feminist scholars, including those in criminology. Although feminist movement

activity is more quiet today, theory and research with a focus on girls/boys, women/men, and sex/gender continues to flourish.

In this chapter, I present and discuss key feminist conceptual breakthroughs in criminology. For those familiar with popularised understandings, these new concepts and theories may encourage an interest to dive deeper, and to embark on more sophisticated understandings of sex/gender in crime, victimisation, and justice. Although Gen Y members seem to be familiar, indeed appreciative, of feminist ideas, some may be uncertain about what it means to be 'a feminist' or what a 'feminist theory' is, or they may lack confidence in applying feminist concepts and ideas to criminological phenomena. If this chapter goes some way toward clearing up confusion and encouraging confidence, then it will have succeeded.