



CRIMINALITY, DEVIANCE AND CONFORMITY
IN WOMEN

- by -

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SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to construct a framework for interpreting female criminality, conformity and deviance in the light of theories of gender role and human agency.

It begins with an outline of a broad perspective which sets the context of the discussion. This requires clear definition of the concepts of the social order, the nature of the law and the justice system, and the moral nature of human beings. These form the groundwork of all criminological theorizing.

The thesis proceeds by establishing the dimensions of female crime as revealed by both the official and the unofficial statistics of England and Wales, the United States of America and Australia. The profile of the female offender which emerges - preponderantly as a shoplifter - is then brought into closer focus with the findings of an investigation conducted by the author into female shop theft in Adelaide, South Australia.

With the subject thus identified, the thesis next reviews the theories yielded by criminology since the late 1960s to explain the behaviour of women offenders. Here is presented a critical assessment of the view of woman which has prevailed in the literature - a popular stereotype of a passive and dependent individual who rarely questions her conventional role in society.

Against this image of woman, as the hapless victim of comprehensive social conditioning, the thesis suggests a more complex model. This is a dialectical view of woman as, on the one hand, a self conscious

and purposeful agent - a model we find repeatedly in the work of major philosophers - and, on the other hand, as a social object, hemmed in by the structures of her society. The constraints on women considered here are those of the female gender role.

With the framework constructed, the thesis sets out to explore a number of ways it might be employed by the criminology of women. Centring discussion on the complex tensions inhering in the agent-object model, female conformity is theorized as a range of positive decisions made by problem-solving women, rather than as an inevitable corollary of effective conditioning for womanhood. The 'female' crime of shoplifting is also examined in terms of the offender's own construction of her behaviour. Information obtained from the author's survey of shoplifters, supplemented with data from interviews with lawyers, forms the basis of this interpretation of the intentions of the female offender.

Mental illness in women, in orthodox criminology, is often regarded as the female equivalent of male criminality. By contrast, the thesis develops a range of alternative explanations of female mental illness which are derived from the basic agent-object model of the argument.

In the last part of this work other modes of female behaviour are discussed. These include diverse examples of social protest in which women have participated illegally as, *inter alia*, food rioters, Chartists, and as suffragettes. These are considered in terms of their politics, their organisation and particularly their overriding rationality. It is in the analysis of such cases of female deviance that the 'agency' element of the model is extended to its fullest thereby demonstrating the potential range of its analytical penetration.