



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: C
SOCIOLOGY & CULTURE

Volume 14 Issue 6 Version 1.0 Year 2014

Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal

Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)

Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Gender and Crime: Addressing Threats to Construct Validity in the Criminological Research

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GJHSS-C Classification : FOR Code: 160801



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Gender and Crime: Addressing Threats to Construct Validity in the Criminological Research

Jeffrey W. Cohen ^α, David R. Champion ^σ & Randy Martin ^ρ

Abstract- In this article, we argue that criminology is in need of a meta-theory that allows for a more complete treatment of the gender-crime relationship. We suggest that one such meta-theory is Integral Theory. Integral Theory challenges disciplinary myopia and opens space for a more complete treatment of complex constructs such as gender. We note that criminology would benefit from an ontological and epistemological pluralism that accommodates the wide range of existing gender theories and recognizes the value of multiple methods designed to test those theories. These arguments are supported via an analysis of recent research on the gender-crime relationship.

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Running Head: *Gender, Crime, and Construct Validity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Not long ago James Messerschmidt (2006) pointed to the general tendency for criminologists to reify gender, suggesting that the continued practice of making gender concrete was problematic for a number of reasons. Perhaps most importantly, relying on a conceptualization of gender as a biological dichotomy hides the very real and often overlooked fact that there are greater similarities across our biological categories of sex than there are differences. While many researchers have embraced Messerschmidt's argument, many continue to over-rely on crude proxy measures of sex (see Cohen, 2009). Moreover, regardless of the complexity of their conceptual arguments, researchers seem to be basing their studies on serious misinterpretations of exactly what it is that biological sex represents.

Instead of viewing sex as determined by a specific set of biological/physiological traits, we should be male-ness and female-ness. This does not mean that we are more open to the recognition that we are individuals based on our assignment of certain traits as indicators biological and physiological characteristics are not pertinent to the study of gender. In fact, we suggest

expanding Messerschmidt's argument to include a rigid adherence to any particular conceptualization of gender, biological or otherwise, as being problematic. The dramatic shift in thinking about gender that accompanied the distinction between sex as biologically determined and gender as socially constructed has served social scientists and feminist scholars well. However, the conceptual shift has not been accompanied by a strong corresponding shift in measurement. We believe that the scholarship on gender is now not only pushing us towards an even more refined conceptual understanding, but also will insist that we develop a congruently complex and nuanced set of approaches to measurement. In this article, we attempt to establish that Integral Theory can accommodate both of these.

Criminological researchers have studied gender from a variety of perspectives, employing varied methodological approaches. While certainly valuable, existing criminological research on gender tends to reflect a more deconstructionist approach to scientific inquiry, leading to relatively fragmented views and seemingly contradictory findings, which, in isolation, generally lack sufficient depth. Without the benefit of an overarching meta-theory (including a more diverse and encompassing array of methodologies) within which to situate past and current approaches to studying gender, important findings will continue to be presented in a fragmented way, leading to a partial view of the complexity of gender and its relationship to other criminological constructs. Further, this fragmented view of the complexity of gender constitutes a significant threat to the validity of our findings, primarily in the form of construct validity, and thereby a threat to our ability to effectively inform gender-aware criminal justice related policy and practice.

As a starting point for our analysis, this article presents a theory of gender that we believe is better suited to dealing with threats to construct validity than are the current dominant theoretical and methodological frameworks. This theory is grounded in existing approaches to studying gender within criminology, but also transcends them through the application of ontological pluralism. Finally, we illustrate how this meta-theory can be employed as a framework for research, by exploring the role of epistemological pluralism within criminology.

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II. AN INTEGRAL THEORY OF GENDER

In their discussion of construct validity, Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002) suggest that when developing a theory of constructs (such as gender) it is important to include multiple operationalizations, link each of those operationalizations to particular dimensions of the construct under study, and take into consideration various perspectives on how well those measures actually capture those dimensions. In order to accomplish this, researchers must provide a “detailed description of the studied instances, clear explication of the prototypical elements of the target construct, and valid observation of relationships among the instances, the target construct, and any other pertinent constructs” (p. 68).

Based on these three elements, strengthening our current approaches to studying gender requires that we adopt a more inclusive meta-theory that clearly identifies the prototypical elements of gender as a construct and opens sufficient space for a diversity of methods.¹ Identifying prototypical features is an essential aspect of translating concepts into operations. However, it is important to recognize that what is prototypical depends on the “particular language community” doing the choosing (Shadish et al., 2002). Our current conceptual models/frameworks tend to represent rather limiting and narrow language communities.

Integral Theory, and more specifically Ken Wilber’s Integral AQAL model, offers a meta-theoretical framework incorporating multiple language communities. In so doing AQAL is well suited to identifying a more complete range of prototypical features and also for accommodating the diverse array of corresponding methodologies. Drawing on Wilber’s Integral model (Wilber, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2001), we present a meta-theory that we believe achieves the three goals described above. While certainly not the only possible meta-theory, what follows is a transdisciplinary model that allows for the inclusion of multiple theoretical perspectives and a language that can be used to speak across theoretical and disciplinary boundaries.

III. THE PROTOTYPICAL ELEMENTS OF GENDER

According to Integral Theory, all human phenomena, including gender, have four distinct, yet interrelated dimensions: interior individual; interior collective; exterior individual; and, exterior collective (see Wilber, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2001). Each of these dimensions relates to a distinct, yet interrelated aspect of human experience. The interior individual dimension corresponds to an individual’s subjective experience.

¹ Frank Williams (1999) made a similar call for the need of a meta-theory in criminology, suggesting the use of chaos theory.

The interior collective dimension corresponds to inter-subjective experience or the shared meaning among a particular group of people (i.e., culture). The exterior individual dimension corresponds to objective experiences such as behavior, biology, and physiology. Finally, the exterior collective dimension corresponds to inter-objective experiences such as the functional fit of parts within a social system.

To fit this within the language used by Shadish et al. (2002), these four dimensions correspond to the four prototypical elements of gender. By organizing existing understandings of gender within these four dimensions, it becomes possible to identify what is already known and fit that knowledge within a meta-theory that allows for cross-disciplinary dialog. We turn now to a detailed explication of these four prototypical elements of gender, based in a more formal content analysis of past and current research published in academic journals within the disciplines of criminology, sociology, and psychology (see Cohen, 2008; 2009).

a) *The Interior Individual Dimension of Gender*

Research on the interior individual dimension of gender addresses how individuals perceive themselves and others as gendered-beings. Perceptions of the self as a gendered-being are sometimes referred to as part of an individual’s gender-identity. Mealey (2000) defines gender-identity as “one’s personal sense of one’s own gender, which may or may not correspond to one’s sex or to the perceptions of others” (p. 466). Much attention has been devoted to the ways in which an individual’s gender-identity develops and impacts their behavior (see, for example, Bem, 1981, 1989; Bussey & Bandura, 1992; Chodorow, 1978; Erikson, 1968; Fagot & Leinbach, 1989, 1994; Gilligan, 1993; Horney, 1939; Kohlberg, 1975; Levy, 1999; Martin, Wood, & Little, 1990; Mischel, 1975; Powlishta, 2000, and; Urberg, 1979).

Conceptual definitions related to the interior-individual dimension of gender have been employed in the criminological literature. For example, in their study of women involved in violent crime, Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez (2006) included concepts such as women’s “identities as partners or mothers” and “perceived threats to their status as a good mother or a faithful partner” (p. 344). Similarly, Ulasewicz (2007) explored how institutionalized female delinquents use or are forced to use their institutionally provided clothes to generate an understanding of themselves as girls. Finally, in their study of the impact of marriage on men’s desistance from crime, Sampson, Laub, and Wimer (2006) suggested that marriage can “lead to...situations that provide an opportunity for identity transformation and that allow for the emergence of a new self or script...” (p.498; emphasis added). All three of these studies include conceptual definitions of gender that are focused on individuals’ subjective experiences as

gendered-beings and the impact of those experiences on their broader self-concept and involvement in criminal/delinquent activity.

In addition to subjective understandings of the self as a gendered-being, the interior individual dimension of gender also includes an individual's subjective understandings of others as gendered-beings. In the social science literature more broadly, this dimension has included: "individuals' stereotyping of politicians as male vs. female" (Hugenberg, Bodenhausen, & McLain, 2006); "ambivalent sexism" (Christopher & Mull, 2006); "benevolent sexist attitudes" (see Fischer, 2006); "sexist attitudes" (DeMarni Cromer & Freyd, 2007); "traditional gender attitudes" (Rederstorff, Buchanan, & Settles, 2007); "feminist attitudes" (Wright & Fitzgerald, 2007); "attitudes toward women in science and society" (Wyer, Murphy-Medley, Damschen, Rosenfeld, & Wentworth, 2007); "support for the sexual double standard" (Bay-Cheng & Zucker, 2007); "egalitarian attitudes about gender" (Karpiak, Buchanan, Hosey, & Smith, 2007); and, "prejudice against women" (Case, 2007). An example from the criminological literature includes Herzog's (2007) study of the connection between individuals' gender-role attitudes and perceptions of the seriousness of intimate partner violence.

b) The Interior Collective Dimension of Gender

Researchers concerned with the interior collective dimension or inter-subjective experiences are interested in the meaning that a particular group shares regarding gendered-beings, or the shared beliefs about the value, characteristics, and traits associated with gendered-beings. These shared beliefs are extremely important in any culture because they "help men and women orient themselves as male and female to each other, to the world around them, and to the growing boys and girls whose behavior they must shape to a commonly accepted mold" (Sanday, 1981, p. 3). Researchers and theorists continue to study how these shared beliefs regarding gender have developed over time as well as their impact within and across cultures (Archer & Lloyd, 2002; Bonvillain, 1998; Brannon, 2002; Daly, 1991; Lorber, 1994; Meade & Wiesner-Hanks, 2004; Sanday, 1981).

Within the criminological literature, Zhang's, Chin's, and Miller's (2007) study of women's participation in human smuggling provides an interior collective conceptualization of gender. Zhang et al. suggest that "gender ideologies about work and caregiving" contribute to the creation of "a more meaningful niche for women in human smuggling operations" (p. 699). These two statements illustrate the shared perceptions of gendered-beings among two different groups, the broader Chinese culture (within which their study was conducted) and human smuggling clientele. Additionally, Cecil (2007) engages

the interior collective dimension in a study of media images of women in prison. Cecil notes that, given the relative lack of first-hand knowledge about women in prison, "media images ... are an important source of storytelling and information," making "each image...extremely vital to understanding these women and their lives" (p. 304).

c) The Exterior Individual Dimension of Gender

The exterior individual dimension of gender refers to biological and physiological aspects associated with gendered-beings, often referred to as sex. Considering this dimension, we are able to uncover those gender characteristics that are experienced in our physical being. This includes physiological development (see Brannon, 2002; Mealey, 2000; Rogers & Rogers, 2001). Clear conceptual definitions of the exterior individual dimension of gender are close to absent from recent criminological literature. Beyond mentions of sex-based differences, there is little conceptual sophistication regarding sex as a control or explanatory variable. Several explanations are available for the lack of conceptual complexity surrounding this dimension of gender. First, it could be indicative of the more general disciplinary trend towards questioning, or to a greater degree abandoning troubling and uncritical biological explanations of gender. While we do not advocate the re-emergence of such uncritical explanations, a more Integral approach would require a fair treatment of the more critical and conceptually complex approaches to studying the exterior individual dimension of gender.

Second, this lack of conceptual complexity could be a reflection of the clear and important distinction between sex and gender as articulated by many skilled feminist scholars, and the shift in focus towards gender as a social construction versus sex as a biological given. We are certainly proponents of this distinction but suggest that it too remains relatively crude and is in need of further refinement, like that offered by the four dimensions described here. Third, the lack of conceptual complexity is reflective of our lack of operational complexity. We suggest this is in part due to our use of a relatively limited range of proxy measures for the exterior individual dimension (e.g., a dichotomized self-reported sex), and fits with our narrow and shallow understanding of what are appropriate methodologies and operational definitions within our discipline and across several social sciences. In a continued (and, we suggest, misguided) attempt to position criminology as a "legitimate" scientific endeavor in the spirit of the "hard sciences," mainstream researchers are unwilling or unable to open space for less parsimonious (read, more complex) conceptual and operational approaches to constructs such as sex.

Finally, and perhaps most likely given our analysis of social science scholarship, the lack of conceptual complexity surrounding the exterior

individual dimension of gender may be further illustration of the taken-for-granted nature of our biologically-based dichotomized view of gender. This becomes all the more apparent when we juxtapose the paucity of conceptual complexity surrounding the exterior individual dimension with a seeming over-reliance on operationalizations of gender oriented around relatively rigid and limited proxy measures of the exterior individual dimension.

d) *The Exterior Collective Dimension of Gender*

Those interested in the exterior collective dimension have predominantly attempted to explain behaviors or activities that are performed by gendered-beings and have been institutionalized within a given society's social systems. We can say, therefore, that gender is also experienced as those institutionalized behaviors and/or activities performed by gendered-beings, which are informed by the specific make-up of particular social systems. Following this line of reasoning, the exterior collective dimension is impacted by both broad social and particular systemic structures within a society. According to some researchers, two social systems that are deeply related to the exterior collective dimension of gender are modes of production and political structures (see Bonvillain, 1998; Brannon, 2002; Frader, 2004; Halsall, 2004; Sanday, 1981). As changes occur in a society's modes of production, we also see changes in political organization and, consequently, the relative involvement of gendered-beings in both.

Two categories of conceptual definitions related to the exterior collective dimension of gender can be found in recent criminological research. The first category represents those definitions aimed at gendered-roles, or the patterns of interaction among gendered-beings within a particular social system. Examples include gender-roles within the family (Jang, 2007), gender stratification in illicit enterprises (Zhang, Chin, & Miller, 2007), and structural inequality between men and women (Vieraitis, Britto, & Kovandzic, 2007; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010²).

Whereas this first category deals with the gendering of systems, the second category relates to the ways in which systems treat gendered-beings. An illustrative example of the types of conceptual definitions that fit within this category is Griffin's and Wooldredge's (2006) empirical study of sex-based disparities in felony dispositions, which discusses several competing hypotheses regarding the differential treatment of gendered-beings by the courts (the chivalry, paternalism, and evil woman hypotheses).

² While not reporting the findings of primary research, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2010) published an extensive toolkit for analyzing gender issues in criminal justice. While recognizing the conceptual complexity of gender (as distinct from sex), the toolkit relies almost exclusively on measures associated with the exterior collective dimension.

As presented here, the four dimensions of gender are already represented, to varying degrees, in the criminological literature. As noted earlier, we believe there is a strong case to be made that these dimensions represent the prototypical elements of gender. In essence, we postulate that these four dimensions can be used to incorporate the variety of ways that we as humans experience life as gendered-beings. Identifying the prototypical elements of a construct, however, is only the first step in establishing construct validity and/or addressing threats to it. As stated previously, Shadish et al. (2002) suggest that it is important to include multiple operationalizations, link each of those operationalizations to particular dimensions of the construct under study, and take into consideration various perspectives on how well the chosen measures actually capture those dimensions. In line with their suggestion, we now shift our attention to how the four dimensions can also be used to construct a methodological meta-framework that allows researchers to employ multiple and diverse operationalizations and link them to the specific dimensions (think prototypical elements) of gender.

IV. AN INTEGRAL FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURING GENDER

When presenting the Integral theory of gender above, we noted that the four dimensions represent four distinct, yet interrelated aspects of human experience. Here we expand our description of the four dimensions to include their representation of four distinct, yet interrelated perspectives. As a perspective, each dimension enacts a particular view of gender. In other words, those who take up an interior individual perspective of gender will come to understand gendered-beings in terms of their gender-identity. By connecting each dimension to its corresponding perspective, we are able to identify instances in which researchers' conceptual definitions are not aligned with their operational definitions—something we refer to as slippage. We begin by presenting studies that employed methodological approaches aligned with the conceptual definitions (i.e., epistemic-ontological alignment). We then move to a discussion of two studies in which threats to construct validity in the form of slippage were present.

V. MEASURING THE INTERIOR INDIVIDUAL DIMENSION

As presented earlier, Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez (2006) employed conceptual definitions such as women's "identities as partners or mothers" and "perceived threats to their status as a good mother or a faithful partner" (p. 344). In order to measure these aspects of participants' interior individual dimension, these researchers employed in-depth interviews. During

these interviews, the women were able to describe their gender-identities and perceived threats to those identities in their own words, from their own perspectives. The use of in-depth interviews allows the study participants to express their understanding of themselves as gendered-beings directly, as opposed to requiring the researchers to make assumptions based on less direct (and arguably less valid) measures.

Herzog's (2007) study of the connection between individuals' gender-role attitudes and perceptions of the seriousness of intimate partner violence employed operations such as the Old-Fashioned Sexism Scale and the Modern Sexism Scale (see Swim & Cohen, 1997), as well as the Benevolent Sexism Scale (see Glick & Fiske, 1997). Each of these scales is designed to disclose the underlying structure of an individual's subjective beliefs regarding gendered-beings. So, not only can the interior individual dimension of gender be studied through phenomenological approaches such as interviews but also through the use of psychometrics. The key, however, is that in either instance the operationalization is appropriately designed to enact perspectives directly related to the dimension of gender under study.

VI. MEASURING THE INTERIOR COLLECTIVE DIMENSION

Cecil's (2007) content analysis of reality-based programming is an example of a study that employs an operational definition appropriately designed to address the stated conceptual definition of gender. In conducting the content analysis (a form of hermeneutic inquiry), Cecil is able to uncover the types of images that are being constructed by the media and, in turn, incorporated into a collective understanding of women in prison. In other words, a content-analysis enacts perspectives that are well-suited to identifying shared constructions of gendered-beings, which are representative of the interior collective dimension.

VII. MEASURING THE EXTERIOR INDIVIDUAL DIMENSION

As already noted, operational definitions of the exterior individual dimension of gender tend to be based on observed sex. For example, in their study of differential suspicion on the part of police officers in the context of traffic stops, Smith, Makarios, and Alpert (2006) used data from citizen contact cards, on which the police officer observed the citizen's physical characteristics and reported whether they were male or female.

Even more common is the use of what can be described as a crude proxy measure based on a dichotomized self-reported sex. An example comes from a study of gang affiliation conducted by Freng and Esbensen (2007). These researchers used data from the

Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) survey on which respondents were asked to indicate whether they were male or female. Primarily, these types of operational definitions are used as demographic or control variables, or to stratify a sample. Often this leads to the use of sex as a way to draw general comparisons across groups. However, a trend towards the use of these operational definitions as proxy measures for the other dimensions of gender is also evident.

The use of operational definitions of the exterior individual dimension of gender (and somewhat simplistic measures at that) as a proxy for the other dimensions introduces a great deal of confusion. This confusion then limits our ability to engage in meaningful discourse regarding the distinct contribution of each dimension to our overall understanding of gender as a complex construct. Specifically, terms such as female/woman/feminine and male/man/masculine are often used interchangeably, as well as the terms sex and gender. While this may at first blush seem like a simple semantic issue, the ways in which we label these various dimensions and the language we use to describe them is an important aspect of disentangling our fragmented approach to the study of gender.

VIII. MEASURING THE EXTERIOR COLLECTIVE DIMENSION

Returning to Zhang et al.'s (2007) study of human smuggling, these researchers explored the exterior collective dimension of gender by addressing gender stratification. They employed an appropriate operational definition of gender stratification by compiling data on the number of women and men involved in human smuggling. Similarly, Vieraitis et al. (2007) measured structural inequality between men and women "along four different socioeconomic dimensions: education, income, employment, and occupational attainment". They then compared women and men in each area by dividing absolute measures for males by absolute measures for females (pp. 62). Whether counting the relative number of differently gendered-beings within a particular system or considering the ways in which gender impacts the interactions among people within a system, this category of definitions is closely linked to the ways in which systems themselves can be, and are gendered.

When discussing the prototypical elements of gender, we noted that the exterior collective dimension has been explored both in terms of how systems are gendered as well as the ways in which systems treat gendered-beings. Regarding the latter, we presented Griffin and Wooldredge's (2006) empirical study of sex-based disparities in felony dispositions. In order to test whether there was differential treatment of gendered-beings within several court systems, they analyzed data from prosecutors' files that included defendant sex,

offense type, familial status (e.g., parental and marital status), and sentence. These data were then used to determine whether the treatment of defendants could be linked to gendered-considerations such as biological sex and performance of gender-roles.

One caveat should be kept in mind when considering the relative validity of these types of measures. Specifically, there is no way to tell whether gender (either biological sex or gender-roles) were salient at the time of conviction or sentencing. In other words, attempting to base our understanding of differential treatment solely on outcomes does not provide a full view of the relative importance of gendered-considerations in the decision-making process. In order to fully capture the complexity of these processes, the framework discussed here would require that additional data be collected and analyzed via methods associated with the other dimension-perspectives.

IX. SLIPPAGE IN CRIMINOLOGICAL LITERATURE

Earlier we introduced the term slippage to describe instances in which researchers' operational definitions do not appropriately match their conceptual definitions. In this section we provide a brief example of slippage from criminological research. Our intention here is not simply to criticize what are often important contributions to our theoretical understanding of gender and its relationship to crime, criminality, or criminal processing systems, but rather to highlight where threats to construct validity arise in order to better inform our approaches to research. It is important to keep in mind that even the most well-intentioned and well-trained researchers can fall into methodological traps associated with a narrow view of science. Indeed, it has been suggested elsewhere that such a view is a disciplinary problem that is not limited to one particular area of study within criminology (see Martin, Cohen, & Champion, 2013).

Matsueda, Kreager, and Huizinga (2006) attempted to link perceptions of risk to engagement in theft and violence. In assessing these relationships, these researchers suggested that "social structural location will affect risk perceptions directly by structuring other sources of information, and indirectly by affecting a person's own experiences as well as structuring peer networks" (p. 100). One of the social structural locations that these researchers consider is gender. As they suggest, gender will situate someone in a particular position within the social structure and this position will affect a person's own experiences. These structural locations, in this case gender, are intimately linked to the roles and activities that individuals engage in (the exterior collective dimension). In order to measure individuals' social structural location as it relates to gender, Matsueda et al. (2006) employed an operational

definition that relied on a proxy measure of biological sex.

They conclude, "[a]s expected, we find that males and high impulsive individuals engage in substantially more theft and violence..." (p. 113) and "that females and younger respondents perceive a higher risk of arrest for both theft and violence..." (p. 107). While these are legitimate conclusions based on the operational approach employed in this study, they tell us very little about the relationships among gender, social structural location, and involvement in violence or theft. In essence, these authors make a claim regarding the links between gender, as a social structural variable, and criminal behavior, but do not employ any operational definitions of the exterior collective dimension. The authors, therefore, are making a conceptual assumption that cannot be assessed using the operational definition employed. We have no indication as to what aspects of biological sex (or gender) place an individual within a particular social structural location (exterior collective dimension), leading females to be more likely to perceive higher risk of arrest or males to engage in more theft and violence.

These researchers certainly conducted what would be considered well-crafted research. The fact that this study was published in well-respected peer-reviewed journal is an indication of its legitimacy within the discipline. Indeed, when considering the study as a whole, we could argue that it offers interesting and important contributions to our understanding of the relationship between sex and some aspect of crime and criminality. What is troubling, however, is that this article, and others that suffer from slippage, also purports to provide contributions to our understanding of particular aspects of gender that it is simply unable to disclose. By applying Integral Theory, we are better able to identify slippage and, ultimately, more fully address threats to construct validity. This study represents but one example of slippage in criminological research. Cohen (2009), however, found instances of slippage in the measurement of gender in 10.9% of articles published in three major criminological journals from 2006-2007³. Interestingly, gender-oriented journals (e.g., *Feminist Criminology*) were found to have more instances of slippage than mainstream journals (e.g., *Criminology*).⁴

X. CONCLUSION

Integral theory recognizes that phenomena, or their referent concepts, are "integral objects"; they are combinations of 1st, 2nd and 3rd person perspectives (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2006, 2010). These perspectives, alone or in various combinations, reveal multiple realities

³ 21.2% and 12.8% of the articles published in the sociology and psychology journals included in Cohen's (2009) study also had instances of slippage.

⁴ This was also the case for sociology and psychology.

for the same object, which Esbjörn-Hargens (2010) refers to as “ontological pluralism.” This multiplicity, however, is not indicative of a relativistic and fragmented world. Rather, it implies something much more complex, that “different realities overlap and interfere with each other” creating “complex and messy” relationships (Law, 2004, p. 61). We must embrace both ontological and methodological pluralism to fully grasp the complexity of concepts like gender. In order to embrace and accommodate this more complex ontology and epistemology, we need not only a correspondingly broad and deep conceptual/theoretical framework, but also a sufficiently broad and deep methodological model. Esbjörn-Hargens also notes that while phenomena indeed exist in a “real” ontological, third-person objective sense, their realities are best perceived as the convergence of multiple pathways, rather than as a singular object (2010). Applying this model to gender (and crime), we propose that the four dimensions constitute both the ontological locations for the object under study and the epistemological methods to approaching that object. That is, they represent both the terrain of reality for a gender/crime research subject and the range available and appropriate maps of that terrain.

Consider the example of intimate partner violence (IPV). We may come to understand IPV as an expression of cultural objectifications and commodification of female-sexed bodies and attempt to assess these dynamics via a content-analysis of popular media representations of such bodies. But this is not the only reality of IPV. The interior individual dimension-perspective would include an investigation of the traumatic effects of IPV on a battered woman through in-depth one-on-one interviews with survivors. The exterior individual dimension-perspective might include studies of the influence of differences in body structures among male and female-bodied individuals on the perpetration of IPV. Finally, the exterior collective dimension-perspective might call for research into protocols on police response and mandatory arrest laws for domestic violence and how they are differentially applied across gendered-beings.

Thus, the Integral Theory presented here suggests that a more nuanced and complete understanding of any given phenomenon is possible when various “expert” lines converge onto the ontological object, each with its own epistemological lenses (Esbjörn-Hargens suggests, 2010). These lines of focus are cast from the perspectives onto the particular object of analysis, culminating in a congregate approach that encompasses clinical, behavioral, criminal-legal, political, physiological, social, cultural, and other accompanying influences. The Integral approach provides a framework for realizing both the richness and the limitations of any single research focus and attending to the strengths and weaknesses of any single method, while leaving open the space for a more

appropriate interdisciplinary approach to studying gender and the gender-crime relationship.

Integral theory offers one possible avenue through which social scientists can begin to deepen their understanding of the scientific endeavor, work towards minimizing threats to construct validity in criminology, and adopt a more nuanced approach to studying gender and its relationship to important criminological constructs. By adopting an Integral lens at both the conceptual and operational level, threats to construct validity can be identified and minimized. As suggested in this article, understanding and applying the four quadrants as dimensions of human experience enables us to more fully and adequately explicate complex constructs such as gender (and crime). By adopting the model presented here we are able to identify a broader range of prototypical elements and move beyond not only the sex dichotomy, but also the gender-sex dichotomy that has predominated gender studies for some time.

The over-use of crude proxy measures such as a dichotomized self-reported sex on a survey not only fails to capture the full complexity of gender as a construct and lived experience, but also indicates a discipline that is method-driven instead of theory-driven (similar arguments have been put forth by Williams [1999] and Walker [2007]). This limits the range of methods and operational definitions we employ, introduces threats to validity such as mono-operation and mono-method bias, and further entrenches a myopic and narrow view of science in a discipline that is in desperate need of methodological creativity and complexity. By considering the implications of Integral Theory we can identify these threats in our own and others' research, provide approaches for addressing the threats, and begin to build a more appropriate research agenda that takes into consideration the varied ways in which we are gendered (and sexed) and how this influences crime, criminality, and crime processing systems.

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