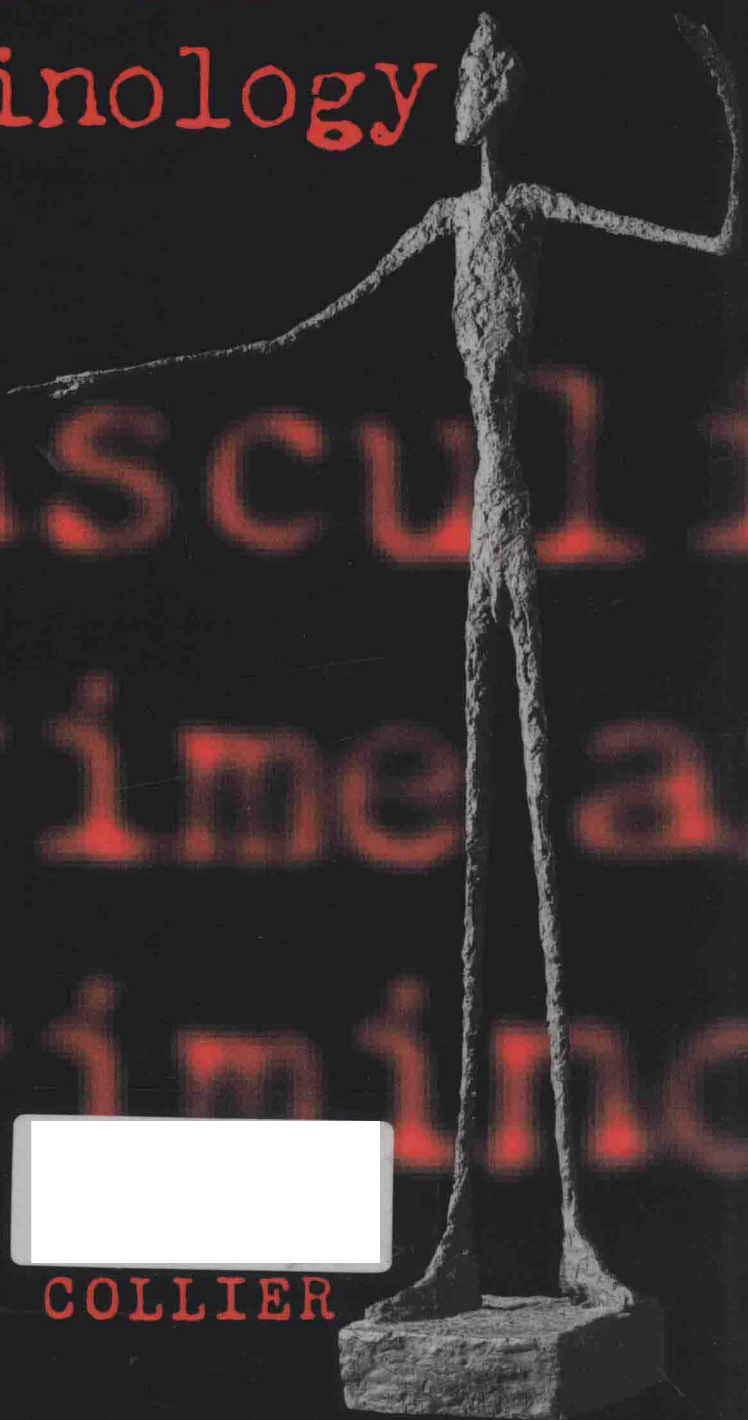


# Masculinities, Crime and Criminology



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RICHARD COLLIER

# **Masculinities, Crime and Criminology**

*Men, Heterosexuality and the Criminal(ised) Other*

Richard Collier

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# Masculinities, Crime and Criminology

## Preface

This book is about a subject which has, in recent years, assumed an increasing visibility, prominence and political significance: the relationship between men, masculinities and crime. Within both the academic discipline of criminology and in relation to a series of public and high-profile debates around crime, criminality and social (dis)order, the subject of masculinity and crime has begun to emerge as one of the most contested, talked about and pressing issues of the day. Different strands of feminist thought have, of course, for some time recognised the association between the 'problem of crime' and the more general 'problem of men'. The deleterious consequences of what is taken to be men's 'normal' behaviour, and in particular a concern to challenge the scale and diversity of men's violences, has been historically central to feminist theoretical and political engagements with the concept of masculinity. Over the past twenty years this idea of the 'masculinity' or 'masculinism' of crime can itself be seen as having become something of an organising concept within a body of feminist scholarship which traverses the fields of criminology, law and related disciplines. In more recent years, however, both in Britain and elsewhere, some rather different conversations have begun to take place about this relationship between men, masculinity and crime. In relation to debates around such topics as dangerous male youth and an emerging urban 'underclass', in concerns about family breakdown, 'absent' fathers and youth crime, and in debates around violence against women and children, an understanding of the crimes of men has been sought through reference to a rather different conceptualisation of masculinity; not just that the crimes of *individual* men might be explained through reference to their masculinity, but rather the idea that *society* itself is presently experiencing what has been termed a 'crisis' of masculinity, a crisis made manifest in both the changing nature and extent of men's criminality. Many of these debates could hardly be described as being 'pro-feminist' in content. Yet, like contemporary feminism, they seek to address the apparently pervasive and intractable problem of crime in contemporary society through reference to the seemingly ubiquitous concept of 'masculinity'.

### Themes and Issues: what is this book about?

- ... one very important new topic is already on the agenda: masculinity.
- ... If emphasis on gender is a key aspect of feminist work, then the

further study of masculinity must be vital. *Without it there will be no progress.* . . .

(Heidensohn, 1995: 80–1; my emphasis;  
see also Walklate, 1995: 160–84)

This book is an attempt to make sense of what is happening in these debates about the 'masculinity' of crime. In one sense this growing, explicit concern with masculinity can be seen as indicative of, and reflecting, a now well-documented 'explosion' of writings about the subject which has taken place since the 1970s, both within the social sciences and humanities and across a diverse range of cultural texts. The subject of masculinity, indeed, has become arguably one of *the* most written and talked about topics of the *fin de siècle* political and cultural landscape. Men's sexualities, subjectivities and desires, their hopes, aspirations and fears, men's power, aggression and vulnerabilities have each been discussed and analysed at length through reference to the concept of masculinity and, increasingly, masculinities. Within the academy a body of scholarship has emerged, variously termed the 'new sociology of masculinity' (Carrigan et al., 1985), the 'critical study of men and masculinity' (Hearn, 1992; Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Morgan, 1992) and, more especially in North America, 'men's studies' (Brod, 1987), which together has produced numerous books, articles and journals and held seminars, conferences and other events concerned to explore the multifarious dimensions to men's lives. Diverse in terms of method, politics and underlying theoretical assumptions, there is no consensus to this work. What tends to unite such engagements with men *as men* is, however, whether it be from an overtly 'pro-' or 'anti-'feminist political orientation, a faith in the analytic purchase of the concept of masculinity and/or masculinities. Criminology has not been immune from this more general 'masculinity turn' in the social sciences, and a succession of books, articles and journals have appeared in recent years echoing this aim of 'taking masculinity seriously' (Carlen and Jefferson, 1996; Messerschmidt, 1993; Newburn and Stanko, 1994a). Indeed, judging by the frequent injunctions which have been made about the need for the discipline of criminology to address the 'masculinity of crime', be it in the context of criminological texts, conferences, seminars or workshops,<sup>1</sup> it might seem to the observer that something of a sea-change in, if not a wholesale transformation of, criminological thought is presently taking place. Criminology, for so long the target of feminist critique as the apotheosis of a 'masculinist' discipline in terms of its epistemological assumptions, methodology and institutional practices, might at last appear to be addressing its very own 'sex question' (Allen, 1989) by seeking to engage with the sexed specificity of its object of study – the fact that crime is, overwhelmingly, an activity engaged in by men.

In this book I shall argue that such an interpretation of recent developments within criminology would be both misleading and misplaced. What follows is, on one level, a contribution to the emerging debate which is taking place around the subject of masculinities and crime. However, and for

reasons which will become clear as the book progresses, it is also a critique of some of the basic premises of this debate itself. The book seeks to question the present iconic status of this concept of 'masculinity' within such conversations and debates taking place about men and crime. It seeks to ask *why* it should be, at this particular moment, that a discipline which has failed so spectacularly in the past to address the sexed specificity of crime should now be turning (albeit tentatively) to an engagement with the 'gender' of men. A recurring theme in what follows will thus be a refusal, a questioning of, and intention to undermine, the presently privileged status of the gendered concept of masculinity over and above alternative – and I shall suggest preferable – readings of the relationship between men and crime based on an engagement with sexual difference, sex-specific corporeality and the idea of sexed subjectivity. As a 'gendered' attribute associated with the sex-class men, the concept of masculinity is, as some accounts from within sociology are now beginning to recognise (Hearn, 1996), both fluid, unstable and politically ambiguous. There may thus appear to be a certain irony in a book seeking to critique the concept of 'masculinity' itself then accommodating this problematic term in its own title. In light of the present seemingly pervasive status of the concept within the social sciences, not least its increasing visibility within criminology, an explicit engagement with masculinity does, at least, locate this book within the context of the debates with which it is seeking to engage. The exploration of sex, gender and the body which follows does not, moreover, imply that 'masculinity' is meaningless. The questions which need to be asked, I shall suggest (and which this book seeks to address), relate to the *ways in which* the terms 'masculinity' or 'masculinities' are presently being made to signify at particular moments and in particular ways. To deconstruct the 'masculinity' of 'criminology' is not to negate the discursive purchase of the concept:

... on the contrary deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that which the term [refers]. ... To deconstruct is not to negate or to dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term ... to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized. (Butler, 1992: 15; Naffine, 1997: 86)

This book is about re-imagining or re-imaging men, not as the taken-for-granted norm of criminology, but from the perspective of 'other', of men as different (from women), of men as (sexed) specific subjects. It is, ultimately, about the social practices which produce 'men' and, of course, the idea of their 'masculinity'.

*Masculinities, Crime and Criminology* is, in one sense, a book about the discipline of criminology itself. It seeks to present the reader with an accessible and critical introduction to, and overview of, past criminological representations of the 'maleness' of crime. Chapters 1 and 2, for example, seek to place the present 'masculinity turn' within the context of criminology's own conceptual and institutional development, by exploring the epistemological, methodological and political foundations of criminology as

a discipline. It has been suggested that criminology is at present seeking to (re)conceptualise the 'gender' of crime via an interrogation of the 'masculinity' or 'masculinities' of men. Yet in so doing, I shall argue, important aspects of the sex specificity of crime itself continue to be effaced. In seeking to 'unpack' the ways in which the 'Man' of a broader crimino-legal field has been a sexed (as male) subject (Young, 1996: 2; see below), this book seeks to integrate into an analysis of the relationship between men and crime a recognition of sexual difference and sex-specific corporeality, to move, ultimately, 'beyond' the paradigms of gender and heterosexuality which have, I shall suggest, in so many ways limited criminological understandings of the relationship between men and crime. In short, the chapters which follow focus on and seek to address elements of the men/crime relation which, I shall argue, continue to be hidden and negated within criminology's 'masculinity question'. This project will, in particular, involve an engagement with the *sexed bodies* of men, whether as offenders and victims (Chapters 3 and 4), as agents working within the criminal justice system, as academic criminologists seeking to 'explain' crime (Chapter 2), or as politicians seeking to 'control' crime (Chapter 6). This book is not seeking to 'bring masculinity into' the criminological gaze. It aims, rather, to shift or to disturb the gaze itself, to open up the conventional borders of the discipline and to question the very concepts, categories and systems of thought which rendered the sexed specificity of crime – the fact that crime is overwhelmingly an activity engaged in by men – invisible in the first place. It seeks to *see differently* the relationships between men and crime, masculinity and criminology.

In so doing what is required is a critical re-focusing on some ignored or misunderstood dimensions to the relationship between men and crime. The concerns of the book are thus not confined to a theoretical engagement with sex, gender and criminological discourse. What follows also aims to intervene in, and to speak to, a series of contemporary debates about the politics of crime, criminal justice and 'law and order'. The chapters which follow address issues of youth crime, schooling and urban disorder (Chapter 3), men's violences and the (hetero)sexed male body (Chapter 4), the relationship between 'family breakdown', fatherhood and crime (Chapter 5), and questions of criminal justice, crime control and crime prevention (Chapter 6). Among the recurring themes of the book will be the nature of the changing configurations of childhood, family and fatherhood, of heterosexual social practices and the sexed subject and, in particular, the relationship between the sexed (as male) body, corporeality and the crimes of men. What will emerge is, I shall argue, not so much an understanding of the relationship between men and crime in which men are seen to be 'accomplishing' or 'doing' masculinity through their involvement in crime (cf. Messerschmidt, 1993), but, rather, a position in which the mutual discursive constitution of crime, criminology and masculinity each emerge as historically specific, and interwoven, constructions of modernity. The present, much-heralded 'crisis' of masculinity, far from constituting a moment of



'truth' about particular changes taking place in the lives of men and women (be it in relation to their criminality, their family roles, their work, economic status, sexuality or emotional lives, and so forth), is in fact, I shall argue, emblematic of broader tensions surrounding ideas of heterosexuality, family and social (dis)order which have marked a reconfiguration of the idea of the 'social' itself within postmodernity. What appear to be conversations about 'masculinity', I shall suggest, can usefully be seen as attempts to tell other stories, to give voice and bear witness to other subjects and to speak of broader concerns, anxieties and tensions.

*Masculinities, Crime and Criminology* is not a traditional criminology textbook. It does not set out to discuss a pre-given body of issues and topics. Such a project is already well served by a range of other texts aimed at the student and teacher of criminology. It does not reproduce the now familiar 'history' of the discipline, that neat and compact linear narrative which traces a progression from the 'dark ages' of Lombrosian biologism through to the sociogenic Enlightenment of contemporary criminology. Nor does what follows seek to uncover a 'truth' about men and crime. Far from presenting any grand theory of men's criminality it begins from a wish to 'relinquish the traditional scientific desire to document exhaustively, to know fully and, hence, to master the individual as scientific object of investigation' (Naffine, 1997: 151). What follows is a series of readings which illustrate particular aspects of the ways in which the relationship between men and crime is constructed within and across a range of discourses. What emerges, we shall see, is something of the complexity of the ways in which specific ideas of masculinity, crime and heterosexuality have been discursively constituted through reference to each other. Far from 'explaining' men's crimes through recourse to an analysis of their status as 'masculine' phenomena, the readings which follow seek to deconstruct both crime and masculinity by locating representations of the men/crime relation within the particular discursive domains in which they are constituted (domains, that is, such as sexuality, the family, childhood and the social).

Given the potential scope of such a project in terms of the ubiquity and diversity of men's crimes, it has been necessary to be selective in the topics covered. Certain aspects or areas of the crimes of men are either not tackled or will be addressed only in passing. What follows has, moreover, a clear western orientation. Much of the engagement is with texts and debates from within British, North American and Australian criminology in particular. However, in seeking to place the production of criminological knowledge on a broader canvas, and in investigating how forms of knowledge about crime themselves become grounded in specific institutional practices, political movements and cultural settings, the concerns of the book necessarily transcend the topic of crime and the traditional remit of the discipline of criminology. What follows draws on scholarship and integrates questions from the fields of feminist theory, sociology, criminal justice and family law, cultural studies, geography, socio-legal studies and social theory. Its sources include a diverse range of representational practices, media and cultural

artefacts, alongside the body of more 'traditional' criminological and socio-legal scholarship. The title of the book itself borrows from a text which remains one of the most influential and powerful in this field, Carol Smart's (1977) *Women, Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique*. To echo the title of such a justifiably celebrated work is, perhaps, to invite charges of over-ambition for this project. My intention is much more modest. Given the development of the topic of 'gender and crime' in the more than twenty years since the publication of Smart's book, and in light of the ways in which subsequent feminist scholarship has transformed the field of criminology, I believe the time is propitious to reassess and reconfigure the relationship between *men*, crime and criminology. I do not mean to invoke by this a 'man' who is pre-discursive and pre-given but, rather, to address the male *subject* of criminology: '... the term "man" should not be regarded as essentially dominant and self-contained; ... in truth, it takes its meaning from the term "woman" [which] can now no longer be regarded as outside the concept of man, but [is] utterly central to it' (Naffine, 1997: 85). Carol Smart's own later work has been influenced (like this text) by developments around feminism/postmodernism and has, interestingly, explicitly sought to reject the discipline of criminology whilst continuing to engage with a discourse of masculinities (Smart, 1989: 86–7) and, more recently, heterosexuality/ies (Smart, 1996a, 1996b). In seeking to re-read the relationship between men, crime and criminology, what follows is, I hope, a useful contribution to a field of feminist and criminological scholarship in which a critical reassessment of the concept of the 'Man' and the 'masculine' subject is, I believe, long overdue.

## Note

1. It is now commonplace for there to be, at the very least, a panel or stream organised around the theme of 'masculinity and crime' at major criminological conferences: see, for example, the programme of the British Criminology Conference, 1993, 1995, 1997. For some time, whenever 'new directions' or 'new agendas' in the discipline have been discussed, the topic of masculinity has surfaced in the context of 'breaking new ground' (see Heidensohn, 1995: 80–1). Unquestionably significant in raising the general profile of the subject was the conference *Masculinity and Crime: Issues of Theory and Practice* (1993), an international event held at the Centre for Criminal Justice Research, Brunel University, 14–15 September, and the subsequent book *Just Boys Doing Business? Men, Masculinities and Crime* (Newburn and Stanko, 1994a). In 1996 a 'Special Issue' of the prestigious *British Journal of Criminology* was devoted to the subject of 'Masculinities and Crime' (Carlen and Jefferson, 1996), a further sign of the growing 'mainstream' acceptance of the topic.

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# Sex, Gender and the (Criminal) Bodies of Men

## Introduction: the new criminology of 'masculinities and crime'

This introductory chapter is an exploration of the diverse ways in which criminology's engagement with the 'spectre' of the question of sex – the recognition 'that [crime] is almost always committed by men' (Newburn and Stanko, 1994b: 10) – has historically been addressed via reference to the concept of 'masculinity/ies'. The chapter is in three sections. The first seeks to contextualise criminology's recent 'masculinity turn' by asking 'why now?' Why, at this present moment, should masculinity have surfaced on the criminological agenda as an issue deserving of analysis in its own right? The second section identifies and critiques the distinct strands to this engagement in terms of their underlying epistemological and methodological assumptions. Particular attention will be paid to the influence of the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. The third section seeks to progress the debate around 'masculinities and crime' by exploring what I shall suggest is an alternative and preferable perspective from which to approach the relationship between men and crime. Recent scholarship around sex/gender, sex-specific corporeality and the sexed subject has, I shall argue, served to destabilise and undermine the concept of 'masculinity' in ways which have important implications for developing understandings of the relationship between men, crime and criminology. At the present moment a debate is taking place around the subject of masculinities and crime which is seeking to address the historic failure of criminology to explain its own 'sex question' (Carlen and Jefferson, 1996; Newburn and Stanko, 1994a). In this chapter I shall argue that the contours of this debate in fact tell us much about the broader reconfigurations presently taking place not just in relation to crime but also around ideas of heterosexuality, childhood, the family and the social. In seeking to move beyond the paradigms of gender and heterosexuality, it is a concern with these questions which will constitute the subject matter of the remaining chapters of this book.

Let us be clear at the outset. The vast majority of conversations and debates around the issue of crime are, in fact, about the actions of men. This is not to claim that women and children do not commit crime or that the offending of women is not treated in ways very different to that of men. Nor, importantly, is it to claim that women and children are not the victims/

survivors of men's crimes. It is to recognise that men constitute the vast majority of all known offenders<sup>1</sup> and that the crimes of men are ubiquitous, the staple fare of newspaper headlines, television and radio reporting, films, novels and television scheduling. Men predominate not just as officially 'known' (and unknown) offenders but also as workers within the criminal justice system. From the upper echelons of state bureaucracies, where policies are devised for the management, control and regulation of crime, through to the 'front line' of the police and prisons, the criminal justice system is quite simply dominated by men (Martin and Jurik, 1996). To a large degree the well-documented public 'fear of crime'<sup>2</sup> is, in effect, a fear of men: of men as potential burglars, of men as physical attackers, of men who steal, deceive and kill, men who abuse, injure, harm and maim. It is a fear of the slow drip of men's violences against women, children and other men, the unforeseen (and foreseen) consequences of men's business and corporate actions. Most crimes remain unimaginable without the presence of men (Jefferson, 1992). The question is: What does this knowledge tell us about 'crime'? What, importantly, does it tell us about men?

This 'fact' can thus be identified, an empirical 'truth', a starting point. Men commit the vast majority of crime. Certainly, the statement may be qualified in different ways, moderated to account for problems associated with the construction and interpretation of criminal statistics,<sup>3</sup> the 'dark figure' of crime and the contingencies of type and frequency of crime (Heidensohn, 1994: 1001). However, and as criminologists have long recognised, it is sex-status which is, along with youth, the strongest predictor of criminal involvement. Men and boys perpetrate more conventional crimes and the more serious of these crimes than women and girls. Sex difference explains more variance in crime across nations and cultures than any other variable. In short, women commit fewer crimes of all types and proportionately fewer serious and violent crimes than men do. It is accordingly, Allen (1989: 19) has suggested, the capacity of criminology to explain this high sex ratio which 'might be posed as the litmus test of the discipline'; and it is a test which, it has been argued by a now voluminous body of feminist scholarship, criminology has failed quite spectacularly to pass.

The problem is not that criminology has failed to recognise that the object of its analysis has been, largely, men and crime. The target of the feminist critiques of the discipline which have emerged during the past twenty years has been with the nature of this recognition, *the way in which* the sex-specificity of crime has been conceptualised. Criminology, it has been argued, has been fundamentally flawed in (at least) two crucial senses. Firstly, it has failed to account for, in anything like an adequate manner, the nature of women's offending and, related to this, the treatment of women within the criminal justice system. This has been seen as a failure to address adequately both the causes of women's crimes and the specificities of women's experiences. Secondly, criminology has failed to address what has become known as the 'gender of crime' itself. It has failed to address the



'masculinity' or 'maleness' of crimes, the crimes of men *as men*; that is, what is it about men,

not as working-class, not as migrants, not as underprivileged individuals but *as men* that induces them to commit crime? Here it is no longer women who are judged by the norms of masculinity and found to be 'the problem'. Now it is men and not humanity who are openly acknowledged as the objects and subjects of investigation. (Grosz, 1987: 6, quoted by Walklate, 1995: 169)

Addressing the former issue – the failure to account for the crimes of women – has been the topic of a now considerable body of feminist criminological scholarship (for example, Carlen, 1983, 1988; Carrington, 1993; Daly and Chesney Lind, 1988; Gelsthorpe, 1989; Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1988, 1990a; Leonard, 1982; Naffine, 1987; Smart, 1977; Walklate, 1995; Worrall, 1990). An explicit concern with the concept of masculinity, however, although frequently implicit in much feminist work, has become central to those more recent engagements with the question of 'gender and crime', which, though overlapping with and heavily indebted to feminist scholarship, have drawn on rather different political and intellectual traditions. By criminology's 'masculinity turn' I am referring to a body of work being undertaken by women and men which has been concerned to explore the relationship between men and crime via an explicit foregrounding of the concept of masculinity and/or masculinities (Carlen and Jefferson, 1996). In seeking to 'reconceptualise' (Messerschmidt, 1993) or 'take seriously' (Newburn and Stanko, 1994a) masculinity, these studies have sought to explore what analysis of the concept might tell us about such issues as the formation of the state (Liddle, 1996; Scraton, 1990; Sumner, 1990; see Chapter 6, pp. 165–7), police culture and policing discourse (Fielding, 1994; Sheptycki and Westmarland, 1993; Westmarland, 1997), schooling and youth crime (Messerschmidt, 1994), questions of 'race' and ethnicity (Bourgeois, 1996; Gibbs and Merighi, 1994), sport and culture (Jefferson, 1996), prisons (Newton, 1994; Sim, 1994; Thurston, 1996), men's violences (Alder and Polk, 1996; Kersten, 1996; Polk, 1994a, 1994b; Stanko, 1994), drugs and consumption (Collinson, 1996), victimology (Newburn and Stanko, 1994c), fear of crime (Goodey, 1997), media representations of crime (Sparks, 1996) and white-collar crime (Beirne and Messerschmidt, 1991: 54; Levi, 1994).

Two recent books, James Messerschmidt's *Masculinities and Crime* (1993) and Tim Newburn and Elizabeth Stanko's edited collection *Just Boys Doing Business* (1994a), exemplify this work. What unites these texts, beyond a considerable overlap in the topics they address, is a belief that the social meaning(s) of masculinity/ies are not 'given' or 'determined' (be it by biology or psyche). The subtitle of Messerschmidt's book captures well the intent of each text: this 'new' critical criminological engagement with masculinity is one of a *critique* (of criminology's 'masculinist' past) and of *reconceptualisation* (of what criminology's future may be once the 'sex