# Visions and Visibility: Gender, Crime and Difference

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**Abstract**

*This essay deals with images and imaginations of gender in relation to surveillance practices and, therefore, criminalisation. Within these, it looks to identify preconceptions, perceptions and interpretations towards and against women and men, particularly in terms of their difference(s). It also addresses social constructions, gender (re)productions and cultural norms, according to those differences. The essay deals with the main aspects of relevant discourses by referring to, and analysing the literature within, the topics of surveillance, crime and gender. It attempts to question the relationships between these three and to investigate them as they occur within a "natural environment". Indeed, the essay reports on an empirical, observation-based project, which involves referring to the words and impressions of those employed in the sphere of (potential) criminal surveillance and the (re)creation of (male) criminality. As such, this contribution endeavours to debate criminological gender difference(s), both in surveillance theory and practice.*

The work of gender is largely under-researched in regard to crime, criminality and criminal potential. The argument in this paper, however, is that gender is actually essential to understandings of, and knowledge about, crime and deviance.[1] In particular, the under-representation of women within both literature and practice illustrates the significance of gender. It is, therefore, sociologically necessary to investigate how gender works in and for criminal distinctions and criminalisation.

This essay provides a brief overview of the existing literature on gender and crime and then moves to present a pilot case of empirical fieldwork, which was conducted to highlight some of the gender work at play. The central theme of this collection of essays is to examine the connections between academic and more popular-cultural words and images. As such, the methodology employed in this essay exposes those elements that can link the two, particularly as they become operationalised in everyday social lives and structures. Specifically, this investigation considers those words and images which (re)produce real consequences for and within the criminological industry.

To clarify: this paper investigates how words and images emerge through the medium of organised surveillance within a shopping environment. In the present study this entails CCTV (closed circuit television) and other surveillance practices that are performed in anticipation of, and to prevent theft (shoplifting). These media are labelled here as pre-emptive in terms of crime; therefore, the study is especially pertinent and revealing for gender idea(l)s. Equally significant is that there is a dearth of research dealing with gender and crime within the topical surveillance discourse(s), although it is clear that modern technological watching provides an enhanced medium for criminalisation, thus inviting questions of a jurisprudential nature. Indeed, when women appear to be ever-increasingly present in contemporary crime statistics, especially for offences where CCTV has played an

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[1] The term employed here is "gender" as opposed to "sex", since it is the socially constructed, rather than the inherent or biological difference (albeit that these are often interdependent) that is the focus of this work.

active part in the criminal justice process, the necessity for gender work to be considered more in criminological frameworks becomes apparent.

In sum, this essay endeavours to achieve two objectives: firstly, to reconsider the research topic of gender and crime within the wider cultural, socio-criminological and inter-disciplinary debates; secondly, to expand upon this by focussing upon gender's significance in and for actual criminal justice practices such as contemporary surveillance. The first part of the essay will introduce some existing theories surrounding (women's) criminality. A brief critical analysis of these ideas will follow, whilst making reference to social constructions both of gender and crime. This involves the posing of several research questions and an attempt to complement and embellish the theoretical bases of criminological thought, claiming that, hitherto, explanations of women's criminality have failed to wholly account for the small ratio of women found in the criminal sphere. This paper also questions how associated practices of policing might inform that sphere. This involves consideration of a particular area where the theories presented might be considered and tested, providing a context for empirical study.

The second part will discuss how the research has been developed and investigated, looking at women's and men's roles within a retail security team, specifically in relation to the identification, surveillance and apprehension of (potential) shoplifters. Representations of both women and men, by both women and men, and the (re)production and reinforcement of gendered norms and ideals will be deliberated.

## PART ONE: THEORY

### 1. A Review of Sources: Words

Evident in others' reviews and the vast array of literature on the subject of crime and criminality, women, as the "fairer sex", have tended to attract less, if any attention: "sex, the most powerful variable regarding crime, has been virtually ignored."[2] Despite accounting for approximately half of any population, women represent a small minority of known offenders, court appearances and custodial sentences. This is especially true in Great Britain. In both biological and sociological approaches to criminological theory, theorists and empiricists alike (though these labels are not mutually exclusive) have concluded that women are less criminal; they have, therefore, been ignored or simply relegated to a few pages or a discrete chapter, or contemplated as an addendum.[3] Of course, the theoretical frameworks found in all disciplines appear to be universally patriarchal.[4] Accordingly, only in rare cases, and particularly more recently, and in some feminist works, especially with the areas of invisibility and over-visibility being the origin of "women's studies", have women been studied and written about. Those texts, however, have tended to refer to and discuss women as traitors to their sex when they have committed crime (e.g. Myra Hindley

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[2] Joanne Belknap and K. Holsinger, "The Gendered Nature of Risk Factors for Delinquency", *Feminist Criminology*, 1.1 (2006), pp. 48-71 (48).
[3] Traditional theories of crime (e.g. anomie, social learning theory, strain theory, differential association theory, rational choice theory, labelling theory, etc.) each having been instigated and developed by men, have tended to predetermine the "criminal" as a man.
[4] Steven Goldberg, *Why Men Rule: A Theory of Male Dominance* (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 2003), pp. 13-15.

and Ruth Ellis – both noted for their peroxide-dyed hair – and Rose West). As such, it seems that crime is incompatible with being a woman. Essentially, the default criminal is a man, and women are "depicted as the other to the [masculine] norm, be it in relation to crime, criminal justice or law."[5] The perhaps related view that "women comprise fewer geniuses, fewer lunatics and fewer morons," that women lack any imagination and are conformist and dull, perhaps "ordinary", has cultivated, it is suggested, the myth of a distinct and altogether less dangerous "female criminality."[6] As a consequence, there follows an appropriate debate. Indeed, "the fact that crime is committed disproportionately by males is the first fact that any theory of crime should fit."[7] However, we might ask: (why) do women commit fewer crimes than men?

Essentially, women's social positions as mothers, homemakers and sexual objects have, historically at least, dictated the conditions and conditioning of their lives.[8] Therefore, when women have committed crime, they have been deemed either masculine or mad; and, of course, with a higher degree of madness corresponding to a lower degree of guilt. Women have certainly not been thought to derive the same types of pleasure and excitement as men could from their crimes.[9] In fact, women who commit crimes have been regarded as "an embarrassment rather than a threat."[10] In addition, women are mostly represented as committing distinctly feminine types of offences, for example prostitution and shoplifting, as well as being mere associates or accomplices, or as victims of (men's) crimes. However, this would seem somewhat contrary to the statistical evidence, which indicates that women and men commit different ratios of crimes, yet these are within all ranges of offence for both. Therefore, gender is significant only inasmuch as women are under-represented: in fact, there are rarely "distinctly feminine types of crime".[11] As with men, «les facteurs politiques, économiques et sociaux […] s'inscrit leur criminalité».[12] Yet, this is where the difference takes place – women and men experience their lives differently in respect of political, economic and social factors. In addition, «s'inscrit», it is considered, is the mot juste. Attributable to social gender constructions, political and economic circumstances have been written, inscribed. Further, they have been (re)produced and reinforced in common culture – words and images in their various media also contributing to and creating such conditions. These have, therefore, become the Foucaultian knowledge, truth and power, and perceptions of women and their criminality and, significantly, their propensity to

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[5] Richard Collier, *Masculinities, Crime and Criminology: Men, Heterosexuality and the Criminal(ised) Other* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 40.

[6] See the reference to Thomas in Dorie Klein, "The Etiology of Female Crime", in *Criminological Perspectives*, ed. by Eugene McLaughlin and others, 2nd edition (London: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 182-210 (186).

[7] Sandra Walklate, *Gender, Crime and Criminal Justice* (Cullompton, Devon, England: Willan Publishing, 2001), p. 1.

[8] Bear in mind that "the specific content of what is learned - as opposed to the process by which it is learned - has received relatively little attention in either theory or research," Gresham Sykes and David Matza, "Techniques of Neutralization" in *Criminological Perspectives*, ed. by Eugene McLaughlin and others, 2nd edition (London: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 231-8.

[9] Walklate, p. 6.

[10] Richard Wright, "Are 'Sisters in Crime' Finally Being Booked? The Coverage of Women in Journals and Textbooks". *Teaching Sociology*, 15.4 (1987), pp. 418-22 (421).

[11] Rita Simon and J. Landis, *The Crimes Women Commit, The Punishments They Receive* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Massachusetts, 1991).

[12] Colette Parent, «La Contribution Féministe a l'Etude de la Déviance en Criminologie», *Criminologie*, XXV:2 (1992), pp. 73-91 (77).

commit (certain) crimes, are defined by them – women are less capable of being interpreted as criminal than men.

As roles have changed and continue to change, however, various commentators have theorised about the impact of emancipation for women, and the effect this has for and on female criminality. James and Thornton, for instance, argue that progress (for gender equality) appears to be a positive force against women committing crimes when there is opportunity to offend, though it is argued by Adler and Simon that the women's movement and the shift towards equality has, in fact, resulted in an augmentation of criminality among women.[13] This is supportive of the view that crime is a masculine activity; that women are becoming more aggressive and "catching up with males" now that they are "on a par".[14] Analyses of historical records indicate, however, that trends such as this have occurred in the past during eras when female liberation was not prevalent, at least not in its present guise. Still, the issue is one of difference. Where else might this notion be investigated?

Difference is also visible among and between women and men who have in common their acknowledged criminality. Men who commit crime are perceived as bad, but macho – at least performing a man's occupation. Women, however, are mad, or delinquent – not in a criminal sense, but a gendered one – they are offending against their "womanity".[15]

Works that have addressed women and their relationship(s) with crime, nevertheless, do not account entirely for the problem of (woman) crime. Official records of rising and falling trends for (women's) criminality in Great Britain and elsewhere might suggest that, whilst the theories in existence may be plausible, they do not represent a full explanation. There could be unknown and undetected rates of crime that would demonstrate a greater parity between the genders. This may be especially so when considering crime in terms of Becker's "Types of Deviant Behavior"; might some women be classed as "secret deviants" as opposed to all women "conforming"?

|  | Obedient behavior | Rule-breaking behavior |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Perceived as deviant | Falsely accused | Pure deviant |
| Not perceived as deviant | Conforming | Secret deviant |

**Table 1:** Types of Deviant Behavior.[16]

Indeed, since crime is not only a function of criminality, that is the propensity to commit crime, but also of external factors, opportunities and constraints, can it be suggested that women's recognition as criminals, amongst other identities, has been *hindered* by societal interpretations of appropriate femininity and delimited by those

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[13] Jennifer James and W. Thornton, "Women's Liberation and the Female Delinquent", *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 17:2 (1980), pp. 230-44; Freda Adler and R. Simon, *The Criminology of Deviant Women* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1979).

[14] Douglas Smith and C. Visher, "Sex and Involvement in Deviance/Crime", *American Sociological Review*, 45:4 (1980), pp. 691-701 (691).

[15] Anita Mak and others, "The Role of Group Identity and Personality Domains as Indicators of Self-Reported Delinquency", *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 9:1 (2003), pp. 9-18 (16).

[16] Howard Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963), p. 20.

external factors operating?[17] If so, then social constructionism, where social facts are actually a product of human choices rather than of nature, whether conscious or unconscious, and the (re)creation of socio-cultural criminal identities, provide lines of inquiry that ought to be pursued. This is especially important given that "a discrepancy may exist between an individual's virtual and actual identity."[18] Social constructions are being applied and experienced, even though "social constructionism has rarely been constituted as an object of study in itself, particularly with respect to questions of gender."[19] As such, whether the application of the law might involve a system of discretionary decision-making, most obviously according to gender differences, is a key point for investigation. If and how this has impacted upon approaches to women's law breaking and criminal justice are pertinent considerations and are especially significant in light of the recent Corston Report 2007.[20] Baroness Corston suggests that, in effect, the volume and gravity of women's offending is so modest that the "female criminal" should become extinct and women's prisons vacated. Is this the direction in which progressive criminologies should journey? How might the eradication of criminality for women square with the notion that women who do commit crimes are more dangerous than their masculine counterparts?[21] Is this another example of misinterpretation and mis-gendered criminality?

## 2. Incorporating Images

In order to investigate some of the issues pertaining to the *man*agement of crime and criminal identities, with special reference to the gendered elements of technique and strategy as they are considered by the above-mentioned works and others, specific circumstances and spaces must be taken account of in relation to examining associated practices and provisions. In thinking about theory, some real practices ought to be addressed. Since it would seem that we understand certain behaviours, including some criminal conduct, albeit wrongly, to be more feminine, the focus could be narrowed to consider a specific offence, and, here, one typically perceived as such: theft by shoplifting. Furthermore, theft from a department store is a case in point deemed particularly apt, as inspired by the work of Abelson.[22] Since at least ten per cent of shoppers in a large department store are said to steal and women are stereotypically considered to be primary and persistent shoppers (See Fig. 1), Kraut affirms that "shoplifting is interesting to study […] mainly because it is a promising area for examining theories of deviance and societal reaction."[23]

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[17]Travis Hirschi and M. Gottfredson, "The Distinction Between Crime and Criminality" in *Critique and Explanation: Essays in Honour of Gwynne Nettler*, edited by Timothy Hartnagel and R. Silverman (New Jersey: Transaction, 1986), pp. 55-69 (58).

[18] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 31.

[19]Chris Brickell, "The Sociological Construction of Gender and Sexuality", *The Sociological Review*, (2006), pp. 87-113 (87).

[20] Corston, Baroness Jean, The Corston Report: A Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System (London: Home Office, 2007).

[21] Dobash and others, *The Imprisonment of Women* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[22] Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving; Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[23] Robert Kraut, "Deterrent and Definitional Influences on Shoplifting", *Social Problems*, 23:3 (1976), pp. 358-68 (358).

**Fig. 1:** *'Girl Shopping for Clothes'*; Anonymous artist. Date unknown. No copyright.

Moreover, an erroneous presumption that women commit disproportionate acts of shoplifting (compared with their participation in other criminal activities), especially because women are branded as shoppers, has been discussed within the research of Cox et al and disproved.[24] Such a refutation is also confirmed in work by Kraut whose self-report data (where offenders provide their own analyses and explanations of their own behaviour) suggest that men, in fact, commit more acts of theft in a retail environment (as supported by recent crime statistics). This clearly demonstrates that shoplifting is not, necessarily, a distinctly feminine type of offence. Is that because men are suspected or caught more and are, perhaps, less adept at deceit, or because women are genuinely less criminal in this sphere? Are women simply more talented at *man*ipulating their gender difference and gendered image in order to "get away with it"?

In terms of theft *man*agement and prevention, then, how does practice become reality? A department store polices in various ways: the most obvious, and perhaps interesting, is through CCTV. It can generally be assumed, especially given patriarchal ideology, that there are «préconceptions vers les jeunes hommes – les hommes sont regarder,»; preconceptions about young men – men are watched.[25] Though Lianos would imply that this is the most appropriate focus, other approaches have considered that the eyes behind the camera may also be influenced by subjective and organisational factors.[26] Essentially, the eyes of the camera are not

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[24] Dena Cox and others, "When Consumer Behaviour Goes Bad: An Investigation of Adolescent Shoplifting", *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 17:2, pp. 149-59 (155).

[25] Michalis Lianos,. «Le Contrôle Social Aprés Foucault», *Surveillance and Society*, 1:3 (2003), pp. 431-48 (439).

[26] Kirstie Ball, "Editorial: The Labours of Surveillance", *Surveillance and Society*, 1:2 (2003), pp. 125-37.

impartial – they are *man*ned. How CCTV operators use and interpret what they see establishes a way (or ways) of watching and identifying (potential) suspects and thus creates, rather than extracts, truth about, who is committing acts of theft or, more accurately, who might.[27] It is therefore contended that subjects (not objects) will be chosen as a result of individuals' and collective understandings of knowing the society. This is because members of that society (re)produce stable, accountable practical activities, replicating the social structures of everyday activities using rationality and routine as "methods for producing correct decisions."[28] In effect, though modifications of the rules that apply can occur there is ever present a "respect for the routine features of the social order."[29] Jurisprudentially crucial, the power rests with those judging at such a basic level and holding the responsibility of applying equality before the law. This is worth noting, since equality is not inherent in it.[30] In fact, it is also constitutionally vital: "No free man shall be taken or imprisoned or dispossessed [...] except by the *lawful judgement by his peers* or by the law of the land"; especially where this may result in judgements about authenticity being made *before* the crime, prejudicially, and as a result of existing gender stratification idea(l)s.[31] However, and crucially, all these actions will be image-based. Essentially, that is according to appearances, specifically structure-observant, stereotyped ones.

Even so, it is necessary to remember that the number of cases detected through CCTV is minimal. Indeed; CCTV does not make theft more difficult.[32] Effectively, a camera operator "has to find you," since not all cameras are watched at all times and often other considerations, such as comfort and boredom affect operator concentration. Still, perhaps men are caught more because they are watched more? If so, what is it that operators are looking for? Who are they looking at? Is there a look? Is it just the "threat to the serenity and escapism of the shopping experience," or is there an alpha male rivalry which fails to perceive women as a menace?[33] These questions render the use of CCTV technologies, in particular, to monitor shoplifting, as genuinely interesting in terms of gender (difference), especially given that most operators are male.[34] In addition, Smith confirms Lianos' statement above, that men arouse the most suspicion and suggests that clothing and appearance are paramount.[35] Ball concurs that the body and dress are a source of information about a person: so how do perceived gender differences, once again, operate here?

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[27] See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: The British Broadcasting Company and Penguin Books, 1972) for a thorough "illustration" of how (ways of) "seeing" varies and can impact upon what is "seen".

[28] Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), pp.185, 180.

[29] Garfinkel, p. 104.

[30] Lucas Introna, "Opinion: Workplace Surveillance is Unethical and Unfair", *Surveillance and Society*, 1:2, (2003), pp. 210-16 (213).

[31] Ralph Turner, "The Meaning of Magna Carta Since 1215: Ralph V. Turner Considers How and Why Magna Carta Became a Beacon of Liberty in Britain and, Increasingly, the United States";
http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst;jsessionid=G6qG5fvxGJStZCC2T5yRf152JjQBMvdfmly5g
Dr1Rcwc4Mwc1Jg5!-1912468643?docId=5002024032, *History Today*, 53, 2003, last accessed 6 August 2008.

[32] Gavin Smith, "Behind the Scenes: Examining Constructions of Deviance and Informal Practices among CCTV Control Room Operators in the UK", *Surveillance and Society*, 2:2/3 (2004), pp. 376-95 (388).

[33] Smith, p. 378.

[34] Smith, p. 385.

[35] Smith, p. 386.

It has been reported in most surveillance studies that there is no particular characteristic that is looked for. In considering ways of viewing, however, we might take into account the "male gaze" and the ways in which both women and men may well have been conditioned in their interpretation of gender difference.[36] Does Mulvey's "voyeuristic phantasy" – it is well documented that women are often only watched for voyeuristic reasons – exist?[37] Is it facilitated or exacerbated through the employment of CCTV? How would this impact upon the surveillance technique of an individual, especially given Ball's claim that "the body is now being positioned as an indicator of truth and authenticity about the individual"?[38] In addition, Ball asserts that there is:

> a tendency in traditional sociology to overcorporealise women: in other words to explain women in terms of bodily capacities of sex, sexuality and reproduction, affording them little sociality.[39]

Indeed, others argue that: "masculinising and feminising practices associated with the body are at the heart of the social construction of gender identity."[40] Further, Frost's claim that the "body itself is the basis for judgement" surely influences the ways in which female and male bodies are watched and interpreted?[41] Perhaps this could also be the case where CCTV and surveillance techniques might entail (mis)use? (Mis)use is especially pertinent where the camera might foster illusion, for example, through operators looking at and for attractive women, where 'attractive' is not compatible with 'bad'. As such, the work of Dozier in respect of initial sex attributions, especially in the context of CCTV, and the claim that "gender is the knowledge that establishes meanings," is indicative of similar notions.[42] How ought these notions to be considered in respect of male egos, which see men in a particular way and women in another?[43]


## PART TWO: PRACTICE

### 1. Deeds not Words

Focussing on not only what is said, but also on what is done, especially in terms of gender practices, the tools for empirical analysis are concerned to access a field where this is possible. As Poggio suggests, ethnographic work is ideal.[44] In addition,

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[36] Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), pp. 6-18.

[37] John Parker, *Total Surveillance: Investigating the Big Brother World of E-Spies, Eavesdroppers and CCTV* (London: Judy Piatkus (Publishers) Limited, 2000), p. 69.

[38] Kirstie Ball, "Organisation, Surveillance and the Body: Towards a Politics of Resistance", *Organisation*, 12:1 (2005), pp. 89-108 (90).

[39] Ibid., p. 95.

[40] Jennifer Wesely and E. Gaardner, "The "Gendered" Nature of the Urban Outdoors: Women Negotiating Fear of Violence", *Gender and Society*, 18:5 (2004), pp. 645-63 (646).

[41] Liz Frost, "Doing Bodies Differently? Gender, Youth, Appearance and Damage", *Journal of Youth Studies*, 6:1 (2003), pp. 53-70 (60). See also Ball, p. 96: "the body is more than a social object, but not quite a subject in itself" and "human embodiment is central to the constitution of the social world."

[42] Raine Dozier, "Beards, Beasts and Bodies: Doing Sex in a Gendered World", *Gender and Society*, 19:3 (2005), pp. 297-316 (pp.305, 307, 298).

[43] Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public* (London: The Penguin Press, 1971), p. 255.

[44] Barbara Poggio., "Editorial: Outline of a Theory of Gendered Practices", *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 13:3 (2006), pp. 225-33.

May comments on the two strands of this method: the pragmatist tradition, according to which "social life is not fixed, but dynamic and changing," and the formalist approach, which proposes that: "while social relationships differ from each other, they take forms that display similarities."[45] This affirms that the author's methodology is one that offers a good basis from which to conduct research into the various facets that might underpin gendered criminality; and the ways in which this may be visible and influenced by (perhaps not only in shoplifting) the decision-makers, or, as Becker terms them, "Moral Entrepreneurs."[46] Surveillance structures not only permit, but incite, individuals to make choices and decisions, according to their subjective understandings of crime, especially as it relates to image. This is not only significant for gender, but also constitutionally problematic given that there is no requirement for surveillance operators to be licensed, whatever that might consist of in practice.

According with the reasoning detailed above, and for the purposes of carrying out the pilot study, a department store and its security team was approached with a proposal of intermittent visits over a period of several months (See Fig. 2). Five security guards/CCTV operators (all men), hereafter referred to as "guards" (a patriarchal term itself) and two store detectives (both women) agreed.[47] Time was



**Fig. 2:** *'Escalators in Shopping Centre'*; Paul Szustka. 14 March 2008. Permission for reproduction granted.

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[45] Tim May, *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, 3rd edition (Buckingham, England: Open University Press, 2001), pp. 148-9.

[46] Title of chapter, Becker.

[47] This was interesting given Abelson's descriptions of departments stores' choosing of women for the role of "undercover detective", since women were thought to be better at this in terms of their aptitude for deception: that is deceiving thieves into believing that they are genuine shoppers, rather than spies.

spent in the camera room and studying the files containing images of "regulars" (known shoplifters), in addition to "walking the floor" as an undercover detective. As fieldwork continued, visits were sometimes pre-arranged, but were by and large *ad hoc*. This allowed for variation of the days and times at which fieldwork could be conducted and staff shift complements accessed. It also ensured that time could be spent with both guards and store detectives, these involving two very different roles in the process of store security. Importantly this illustrated the gendered elements at play at the site in question (are women employed as detectives because they can better play the "undercover" card and, therefore, also deceive?).

Gender, particularly gender image, is a key focus of this research project and essay. Concerns about the impact of gender within the context of the empirical study can be inferred from the hypotheses given below:

1. Different crime rates for women and men derive in part from the lesser attention that women receive from surveillance workers;
2. Although gender is a main determinant of perceived criminality across most social strata, it is a far less important factor among individuals considered by surveillance workers (again, based on appearance) to be members of a lesser class. That is, all people who are perceived to be part of that class are equally visible and equally observed.

However, these propositions can be qualified through the consideration or intersection of other variables (e.g. age and race / ethnicity).[48] Nevertheless, these hypotheses have formed the bases of the research project and, indeed, the possible understanding(s) of some implications of, and for, gender perceptions in terms of shoplifting and surveillance.

The focus of this research is not, as such, who is caught, but who is watched, identified,[49] and, according to what (underlying) reasons. Is Parker's research data universally applicable, leading to the assertion that the camera (operator) seeks out male youth (especially black male youth) in particular, ignores women, except when the cameras are used for "voyeuristic reasons", and looks at forty per cent of targets for no obvious reason?[50] Are those who "disappear from sight" and "melt away from view […] hid[e[ing]] or sneak[ing] away", or are they "present, but of no concern"?[51] How are CCTV images perceived and interpreted? This inquiry engages with how CCTV is (and might be) used, for what reasons, and how this can relate to the reality of shoplifting *man*agement in conjunction with store detectives.[52] Given that a rolling average of seventy-two per cent of the population do not object to the presence of CCTV, the fact that it is now everywhere, and heavily invested in by the Government

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[48] Age, or perceived age, proved an interesting variable, and is outside the remit of this essay. Race and ethnicity, although clearly relevant, did not emerge from the data as significant since the site at which research was conducted is located within a City where migration and diversity are only more recently becoming evident. This is a line of inquiry that will be pursued in future.

[49] Though it must be stressed that "labelling" explanations cannot wholly account for the level of crime committed, nor the causation of offenders' actions, as discussed by Becker, pp. 178-9.

[50] Parker, pp. 69-70.

[51] Goffman, p. 257.

[52] Might it be purely for the purposes of increased confidence in approaching and, as one male guard mentioned, accusing a person of being a thief and allowing convincing evidence for subsequent prosecution? This is discussed by Martin Gill and V. Turbin, "CCTV and Shop Theft: Towards a Realistic Evaluation" in *Surveillance, Closed Circuit Television and Social Control*, ed. by Clive Norris and others (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 1998) pp. 189-204.

and local authorities; can it be trusted to actually reduce crime, in any setting, or is it merely another form of social control?[53] Is this control gendered? And, if so, specifically, how, within the context of retail?

## 2. Interpreting Images

According to the data collected for this project, a camera operator typically: "…look[s] for if they're differently dressed [or] the way they're acting in store," (male guard). Another elaborates:

> Er, initially, I'd say [in] the first fifteen seconds you're supposed to tell, but not always the case. It's the more experience you get as in the more people you observe, the more little traits you pick up, so instead of looking at a guy in a suit or a guy in trackie bottoms, you start watching body language and then you totally forget what they're wearing although you still think about it subconsciously, and if a guy in a suit starts acting dodgy you're still inclined to look, but if there's a guy in a tracksuit you're more likely to notice that. It still comes down to body language for me anyway, that's what I'm looking for (male guard).

Notice three significant themes arising from this passage; the default male, the issue of appearance and the issue of class.[54] Also note the repetitive and self-contradictory nature of the last factor, that is class, in making sense of the process. On one occasion, and interestingly, this applied equally to the description of a female shoplifter who had been caught: "a right Vicky Pollard" (male guard). Indeed, she was wearing the "trademark" tracksuit and pushed a buggy, matching exactly the stereotypical character portrayed within the television comedy *Little Britain*.[55] Ironically, or obviously, her character is played by a man, alluding to the masculine domain of "proper" deviance and criminality. This reinforces the idea that images and imagination are embedded in and impact upon social processes. The hypotheses given indicate that gender differences are less pronounced within a certain class demographic, yet that gender identities and images within that demographic still matter: all are deviant, but this term is understood here as it usually applies to men. Perhaps for "Vicky Pollards", gender does not necessarily mean everything when it comes to difference? Perhaps difference concerns how gender image is read and can change in relation to other interpretations of image? Does this suggest that gender can be more fluid? That difference is not only or even primarily about gender?

In terms of accurately identifying a (potential) thief, another statement is particularly revealing for this question: "Males and females; it's not any harder to pick them up or not pick them up, really it's just the same, gender doesn't really come into it" (male guard).[56] This is somewhat reminiscent of an ideal suggested by

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[53] Parker, pp. 65, 11, and 66-7.

[54] One male guard also mentioned that he likes to say something like "Do you want a cup of water or the newspaper to read while you're waiting, mate?" to thieves caught and awaiting a Police unit. The masculine language and assumed male are interesting, but so too is the "mate" treatment: see Goffman, p. 42, on "acceptance". One female detective, interestingly, talks about being able to chat with the women they catch in a similar vein.

[55] Bendelack, Steve, *Little Britain* (London: BBC, Pinewood Studios).

[56] Though one male guard does suggest that gender might actually "come into it" in respect of the items targeted and stolen. He and one female detective, however, disagree about the items with which they have the worst problem: she believes that women's clothes are taken most whereas he believes that it is men's.

Cruikshank, who has said that gender should have no place as an issue in terms of analysing crime.[57] Somehow, however, it does not seem that these comments were made with the same sentiment. Nevertheless, and not unexpectedly, a female detective's perspective varies somewhat:

> Males, well you know, their hair dripping and looking disgusting. Where females can do so many different things to their hair compared to males.[58] But I feel that I can identify males better. Obviously if females look terrible, then I'm going like, right OK.

"I tend to pick up females ones who don't look dodgy… eye contact…cautious…yeah…pure luck…" (female detective). Her words re-establish that difference and image are gendered. Again, there are allusions to appearance and look, but the mention of "pure luck" refers to the claimed randomness of the detection process.[59] Ironically, this alleged arbitrary nature of such surveillance work must be challenged. It is clear that preconceptions and prejudice, often based upon popular cultural representations of women and men, such as those seen on television, in newspapers etc., actually guide and determine (re)actions. Even so, luck extends beyond this female detective's assertions and is ubiquitous throughout this research. All participants made such references, unaware of, or reluctant to acknowledge, the means by which social influences can be created and recreated within a "chicken-egg" model, assisted by related or unrelated cultural practices. Also on that note, and perhaps more interestingly, the omnipresent male gaze was referred to in this context, which effectively undermines professional vigilance and judgement: "Let's be honest, you're more likely to watch women" (male guard), again operating according to and (re)constituting normal gender practices, necessitating this recognition of and debate on difference.

It might be argued that a practical approach to monitoring sixteen cameras over three screens for anything up to an hour at a time, perhaps four or five times a day, over a full-time working week has encouraged, generated, justified and propagated a particular mode of thinking amongst the guards at the store.[60] Functional for work purposes, this mode is actually also commonly sanctioned within popular cultural norms and practices; a discussion for another essay. Essentially, in the context of retail surveillance, the following, sometimes contradictory, thoughts dominate and regulate camera use: "Women either aren't shoplifting or are very good at it. That they aren't is more likely" (male guard); "Women are perceived to commit less crime" (male guard); "People automatically assume that males are criminals, like. If you've got a female, people don't see it, like" (male guard). Perhaps experience informs the approach taken and most logical and efficient methods for distinguishing between customers and thieves, although one male guard would

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[57] Barbara Cruikshank, "Feminism and Punishment", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 24:4 (1999), pp. 1113-17 (1114).

[58] On one occasion, there was a radio report from another store to warn of a woman and man couple known to local police and retailers. The woman was said to have changed her appearance with a new hairstyle and colour and was unrecognisable when compared with the images of her disseminated. Women's aptitude for enhancing age was also discussed at several points during the fieldwork and comments such as "They're really not all that bad done up [?,?]" (male guard) were made.

[59] See Goffman, pp. 238-333 as to "normal…typical…and proper appearances" and expectations.

[60] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, United States of America: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 11-12, and his discussion of the "sensible visible" and "invisible thinking", i.e. perception before thinking, and retrospective "rationalising". Also, at p. 50, "But it is clear that in the case of perception the conclusion comes before the reasons, which are there only to take its place or to back it up when it is shaken."

always insist that "you treat every customer as a thief until they have paid," but are such notions reliable? Is this possible?

Camera systems have default settings; it is possible to see, in general, all entrances/exits, until manoeuvred to view locations and/or subjects of interest. Yet, human eyes cannot look at each and every single screen, let alone customer, all the time, thus refuting the panopticon theory. It is highly impracticable; even the most sophisticated CCTV system and a full complement of staff could achieve only a proportion of that volume of watching. Although this does not correspond with cultural understandings of how it ("big brother") operates, various knacks have been developed, mainly in line with the (gendered) bases and biases provided in the hypotheses, to look for certain characteristics: footwear, used carrier bags, suspicious movement, clothing and various other appearance-related features. One male guard asserted that: "There is a feeling and I know when it is radioed to check out a certain guy [corrected to "person"]. I can tell in seconds."

A Bourdieusian notion can therefore be said to exist for those using cameras: essentially, existing embedded rules and systems are used to interpret shoppers' legitimacy and reinforce society's ideals and norms, rejecting those ("criminal" women) stigmatised as abnormal.[61] This is either to maintain easy control or to be fully involved in self-preserving, albeit prejudiced, survival and competition action.[62] But; men do not require to compete against women. In addition to the power of being able to read authenticity and know whether someone is worth watching, camera operators have become complacent and certainly shop floor staff less vigilant, as if the CCTV automatically does all the work.[63] More adept social commentary, however, looks to the less objective conceptualisation of CCTV. During one visit of approximately two hours' duration, there was mainly gossip and a treat to some time spent scanning the floors for "homos" and "good looking birds" and to focus in on "cleavages". This was not the first time that it became clear that cameras are frequently used in a non-security capacity. One male guard once played an archived recording of his camera talents. A man who had walked into the store was being followed. Meantime, the operator had become distracted by an attractive woman in the same vicinity and began to use the camera for a somewhat more recreational purpose: "Ignore when I've zoomed in on her cleavage." Watching an hour of footage accelerated to play over just a few minutes, it could be noticed that there were five instances where the focus had been on only "two things" as he had so astutely termed them – her breasts.

There is, of course, also the constant danger that the operator is watching the wrong screen, or person, or missing something altogether. What goes unnoticed, unknown, is substantial, but also has the potential to be significant, especially when the team is "short staffed".[64] Equally, and more applicable here, and as afore-mentioned, there is a general consensus of both guards and detectives that: "It's about luck" (female detective); "It's all pure luck" (male guard).[65] But, which images are lucky, and which are not, can reveal the common and criminalised

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[61] These are, as McCahill writes, subject to "intensive and intrusive monitoring": Michael McCahill, *The Surveillance Web: The Rise of Visual Surveillance in an English City* (Cullompton, Devon, England: Willan Publishing, 2002), p. 120.

[62] Goffman, p. 248.

[63] See McCahill, pp. 103-145 on "the panopticon mall".

[64] "They try and bypass us and bypass the cameras and sometimes they do and we don't know. It's the ones that get away. We don't know. The unseen. They've got away with it. They're the lucky ones [?,?]" (male guard).

[65] Also described as having a "hunch [?,?]" (male guard).

conceptualisations of gender. The possibility that the unknown figures for women and men might be equal was not considered by the operators.[66] Remember: gender does not come into it. What, then, can be concluded about the objectivity of the security work carried out at the store and, indeed, anywhere and for any purpose, including more formal arrangements, such as those the police make? How do these findings extend beyond the watching stage and inform other levels of contact with the criminal justice hierarchy, for instance when a crime is actually committed? (See Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3:** *'Reality Rubbish'*; Photographic artist: Clare Frances Wilkie; Graffiti artist: unknown. Date unknown. Permission for reproduction granted.

Given the review of sources above, it is particularly interesting, for example, that a primary and very common concern among the male guards is that a female "stop" might be pregnant, or claim pregnancy or even sexual assault.[67] These specifically feminine *man*ipulations of the female body and sexuality were strikingly associated with all female targets as discussed during this fieldwork.[68] Though participants were adamant that they are not biased in the ways that they identify and watch and do not have a preference for either sex when they have to "catch", references to women elicited phrases such as: "…just gotta be careful how you put your hands on them" (male guard), and:

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[66] Simonetta Bisi, "Female Criminality and Gender Difference", *International Review of Sociology - Revue Internationale de Sociologie*, 12:1 (2002), pp. 23-43.
[67] Targets are persons apprehended on suspicion (at all times with camera recorded evidence or corroborated personal accounts of two or more witnesses) of shoplifting, whereby the goods will be recovered, the thief detained, and the police called. The specifically feminine aspect relates to bodily capacity: "Modern times and all that" (male guard).
[68] This might indicate that women "catches" are mainly of a child-bearing age.

> Stopping them? Er, yeah, you're more aware really, obviously you've got to watch. With males I don't really think we bother. With females, you definitely have to try and watch and try not to touch them if you can and make sure you're not touching them where you shouldn't and that…

This was a shared view:

> …you don't know if that female is pregnant for a start and no matter what she does, if you slam her against a wall and that damages the baby that comes back on you.

In terms of "male violence", this turn of phrase is interesting.

One female detective, on the other hand, was more expressive of the shared view that you allow no "catch" to get away, i.e. that objectivity is key: "I don't care, 'cos I've got the guys' back-up, so I've no reason to be not wanting to stop a female… or a loudmouth or someone like that…";

> Girls can be really catty. Like you know what I mean, aye? ... I've had one female, where I've been like what am I doing? You know like… I literally had to grab on to her and say get back up them stairs, you're going now…

Perhaps the "sex-sanctioning issue", the way(s) that a woman, as opposed to a man, would judge a woman is relevant with regards to the different approaches that the sexes take towards women. [69] Their aims, however, as determined by the organisational context, should be identical: recover the goods and catch the thief. [70] The chivalry thesis (that women escape retribution due to the way the male-dominated and legal systems can and cannot treat them) may also come into play, however, and, whilst the final outcome, the rates of detected (not necessarily actual) theft, may not differ, the treatment of women "catches" by men, from a security perspective, is certainly deliberated to a far greater extent than that of male "catches". Moreover, women who perform surveillance work, at this site, operate for somewhat different purposes, with different concerns – principally driven by the concern that *they* might be outdone by a woman, implying a concept of intra-sex competition. Women also feel more secure in their apprehensions when they are assured of male "protection" from colleagues. Fundamentally, and because the majority of work here is performed by men, women, it is argued, are viewed as less (potentially) criminal and are considered more in terms of their "femaleness" or femininity, their bodies and their sexualit(y/ies) – their gender image – than are men. The importance of femininity applies equally for the women staff.

Finally, and as a firm indicator of contradiction and potential (mis)representation through perceptions and interpretations, which influence and inform surveillance work; one male guard suggested that he is: "... a bit more wary of the males probably… I've been bitten once, yeah. Sometimes you get knives pulled. I've never had a knife or needle pulled by a female." Contrasted with this, in respect of information published in a local police initiative album, it was said by a male guard that:

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[69] There can also be tears, which the male guards find to be "awkward"; one, perhaps better, female detective, on the other hand, described a particular woman's reaction as "shaking and crying and hysterical."

[70] See this discussed above in respect of CCTV and surveillance.

> … there's one person that's got a firearms marker, and that's a female… a little lassie with angelic blonde hair, blue eyes, ken what I mean, so you could be dealing with her.[71]

Even in criminal identity, there is difference.

## Conclusion

Whilst absolute conclusions cannot, as such, be offered, it is hoped that the foregoing has asked new questions, opened avenues for extending this work and, essentially, illustrated that social construction questions and investigations are worthy of revival in researching the areas of gender, crime and deviance, particularly where such approaches can be employed to provide better insights into these and their intersections. This is especially so where there is a notable absence of gender-oriented study.

This essay has both positioned notions of women and crime within some of the socio-criminological discourse and has narrowed this wide notion in order to focus upon specific practices, in particular considering the word, or theory, and image, practice-based, elements. It has embellished some of these with data collected within one research site. The documentation of these and attached, albeit exploratory, analysis has brought to the fore some of the gendered elements of criminal justice as performed through retail surveillance and its perpetrators. It has also indicated that such elements are reinforced, facilitated and made visible by cultural inscriptions on society, made via both word and image. It is anticipated that future work will explore the intricacies of both crime and gender within these, and possibly other, contexts, but, most importantly, that the relevance of gender and visibility to and for broader understandings and knowledge of crime has been established here. Indeed, it provides the justification for extended research in this area and, indeed, any that deals with gender and difference(s), for there are many, as is illustrated within this collection.

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[71] "Firearms marker" is a reference to the local police project folder which contains images of known shoplifters and their "forms".

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