

# CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY



## KEY DEBATES

- NATURE (biological) vs. NURTURE (learned/society)
- DETERMINISM (trait theory says genetics determine behaviour) vs. FREE WILL (person chooses their behaviour)...



## EYSENCK'S CRIMINAL PERSONALITY THEORY

**Criminal personality - traits associated with people who commit crimes. Something that is inherited through genetic inheritance & innate (born with it).**

### EXTRAVERSION

High E score = sociable, lively and sensation seeking;  
BRAIN: extroverts have a low level of arousal in their cerebral cortex (as stimuli is restricted by RAS) and therefore need more stimulation from their environment, leading to risky & anti-social behaviour.



### NEUROTICISM

High N scores = anxious & react very strongly to aversive stimuli.  
BRAIN: the ANS becomes over-aroused and affects the limbic system, causing violent & unstable behaviour.

### PSYCHOTICISM

High P score = aggressive & egocentric.  
BRAIN: due to an excess of dopaminergic neurons, which causes an overproduction of dopamine and leads to less inhibitions & more aggressive behaviour.  
**Eysenck believed that criminality develops mainly due to genetics but early socialisation and difficulties in conditioning can also play a part.**



### LIMITATIONS

- Ignores individual differences- Unlikely criminals who commit different crimes all share a similar personality.
- Too deterministic as it ignores free will.
- merely identifies certain characteristics that may link to criminality. It does not inform us why individuals commit criminal acts.

## NATURE

### HEAVEN (1996) STUDY INTO DELINQUENCY & EXTRAVERSION, PSYCHOTICISM & SELF-ESTEEM AIM

To test the correlation between Eysenck's personality traits and delinquency.

#### SAMPLE

282 teenagers (aged 13-15) from two Catholic schools in Australia.



#### RESEARCH METHOD

Questionnaire and longitudinal study

#### PROCEDURE

Participants completed questionnaires at Time 1 (around 14 years old) and 2 years later at Time 2 (around 16 years old).



1) measured psychoticism, extraversion & self-esteem (better measure than neuroticism).

2) used self-report to measure delinquency (looked at violence, vandalism & theft).



#### FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

- Males are more likely than females to be involved in delinquency at Time 1 & Time 2.
- There was found to be a positive correlation between psychoticism & delinquency at Time 1 & Time 2.
- But traits only explain a part of criminal behaviour.

**Psychoticism is linked to delinquency.**

#### LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

- Sample culturally biased (unrepresentative & can't be generalised).
- Limited by social desirability as it was self-report..

## SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY OF CRIMINALITY

**Bandura suggested that all behaviour is learnt through observation & children are particularly influenced by what they see, this includes criminal behaviour.**

### ROLE MODELS & IDENTIFICATION

Children will identify with role models - people we look up to and respect who model behaviour for us. They will decide they want to be like these people.



### OBSERVATION & IMITATION

A child may observe a criminal act - creates a mental representation in their mind because they have seen this particular behaviour they are more likely to copy it.

### VICARIOUS REINFORCEMENT

A role model is observed being rewarded for their criminality; financially or through an increased status. More likely to lead to criminality being imitated if positive.

### DIRECT REINFORCEMENT

Observer engages in criminal act and receives reward, is likely to continue.  
*N.B. reinforcement can also be negative & can deter.*



### INTERNALISATION

The behaviour becomes part of us & no longer needs to be reinforced for it to continue - will repeat behaviour despite consequences (e.g. punishment, harm).

### LIMITATIONS

- Ignores the role of nature - e.g. brain dysfunction & genetics
- Doesn't explain how criminal behaviour starts in the first place (first wave criminals)
- If it's correct, should be easier to reduce crime through conditioning..

## NURTURE

### COOPER & MACKIE (1986) STUDY INTO VIDEO GAMES & AGGRESSION IN CHILDREN AIM

To see if aggressive video games would lead to increased aggression.

#### SAMPLE

84 children, aged 9-11 from schools in New Jersey, USA



#### RESEARCH METHOD/ DESIGN

Lab experiment, independent measures design

#### PROCEDURE

- 1) Two groups - played or observed either missile command (high agg.), pacman (low agg.), or maze (control).
- 2) Playroom - observed which toys each child played with (aggressive, active, quiet, skill).
- 3) Asked questions about reward/punishment using buzzer.



#### FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

- Children playing aggressive game spent longer playing with aggressive toy. Esp. with girls
  - Boys preferred to play.
  - Type of game had no effect on interpersonal aggression (buzzer ques.)
- Playing or watching an aggressive video game had an impact on aggressive behaviour of girls but not boys.**

#### LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

- Sample was culturally biased - cannot be generalised.
- Lacks ecological validity as it was a lab experiment (artificial conditions)

## KEY CONCEPTS

### CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

Any act that goes against the law of the land.

### TYPES OF CRIME

Violent (e.g. assault); drug-related; acquisitive (e.g. theft); sexual (e.g. rape); anti-social (e.g. vandalism).

### SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

society determines what is considered criminal behaviour, so it can change over time and place.

### DEVIATION FROM NORMS

Crime is when an act or behaviour goes against what is expected in society.



### ROLE OF CULTURE

Collective set of norms that determines a way of life for a group of people. As cultures change, so do their norms.

### MEASURING CRIME

Using self-report methods, which may not be reliable. Not all crimes are necessarily reported.

## APPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

### USE OF PUNISHMENT TO REDUCE ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- (a) **Prisons:** taking away freedom, rights & privileges.
- (b) **Fines:** money can be an incentive to committing crimes like theft so loss of money should have the opposite effect.
- (c) **Community sentences:** offenders also pay back to society by giving up their time.
- (d) **Deterrent:** Many people do not commit crimes in the first place and this is because they want to avoid the negative consequences that they have seen others suffer.



### USE OF REHABILITATION TO PROMOTE PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- (a) **Restorative justice:** The victim of the crime will meet the criminal, the offender has to take responsibility or their crime and face the consequences of their actions when talking with their victim. Offenders are encouraged to apologise, return any property/money and complete community service bringing them back into the community.
- (b) **Positive role models:** offenders observe the actions of pro-social role models so they can learn how to behave.