



An Introduction to
Criminal Psychology

RUSSIL DURRANT

Second Edition

An Introduction to Criminal Psychology

This book offers a clear, up-to-date, comprehensive, and theoretically informed introduction to criminal psychology, exploring how psychological explanations and approaches can be integrated with other perspectives drawn from evolutionary biology, neurobiology, sociology, and criminology. Drawing on examples from around the world, it considers different types of offences from violence and aggression to white-collar and transnational crime, and links approaches to explaining crime with efforts to prevent crime and to treat and rehabilitate offenders.

This revised and expanded second edition offers a thorough update of the research literature and introduces several new features, including:

- detailed international case studies setting the scene for each chapter, promoting real-world understanding of the topics under consideration;
- a fuller range of crime types covered, with new chapters on property offending and white-collar, corporate, and environmental crime;
- detailed individual chapters exploring prevention and rehabilitation, previously covered in a single chapter in the first edition;
- an array of helpful features including learning objectives, review and reflect checkpoints, annotated lists of further reading, and two new features: 'Research in Focus' and 'Criminal Psychology Through Film'.

This textbook is essential reading for upper undergraduate students enrolled in courses on psychological criminology, criminal psychology, and the psychology of criminal behaviour. Designed with the reader in mind, student-friendly and innovative pedagogical features support the reader throughout.

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An Introduction to Criminal Psychology

Second Edition

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CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH FILM

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PREFACE

The aim of *An Introduction to Criminal Psychology* is – as its title rather plainly suggests – to introduce the topic of criminal psychology. Although mainly intended for undergraduate students the book may be of wider interest to general readers, policy-makers, and academics from other disciplines who are interested in finding out more about the causes of crime and different ways of responding to criminal behaviour. The word ‘psychology’ in the title should clue readers in to the main focus of the book, but my aim throughout is to explore how psychological explanations and approaches can be integrated with other perspectives drawn from evolutionary biology, neurobiology, sociology, and criminology. Although pitched at an introductory audience with no prior knowledge of the field one of my aims was to ensure that the book is firmly anchored in the research literature. Unfortunately the picture of crime (and criminology) that we often receive from the media does not necessarily provide a very accurate portrait of crime in society or the activities of criminologists and criminal psychologists (much to the disappointment of many an undergraduate criminology student!). As such, the book has a lot of references, and I hope that it can serve as both an introduction to the topic and a useful reference source.

I well remember one year in teaching my undergraduate course, Criminal Psychology, when having reached the sixth lecture a concerned student appeared at my door during my office hour. She explained that, although she was enjoying the paper, the course was – literally – giving her nightmares. On reviewing the content matter this perhaps was not surprising – we had spent close to 12 hours covering aggression, violence, serial murder, mass murder, sexual violence, genocide, and terrorism, and it wasn't until Lecture seven that – for what probably seemed like a bit of light relief – we turned to the topic of drugs and crime. Several reviewers of the first edition also noted the rather extensive coverage of violence compared to other topics and encouraged me to expand the range of topics covered. The second edition, then, includes two brand new chapters – one on property offending and one on white-collar, corporate, and environmental crime. In addition, the topics of prevention and rehabilitation previously covered in a single chapter now get their own chapter, allowing for a more detailed coverage of these topics. Other changes from the first edition include a thorough updating of statistics and the research base, many new figures and tables, and the introduction of two regular features that will pop up in each chapter: Criminal Psychology Through Film, and Research in Focus.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at Routledge for their encouragement and support through the process of writing this book. I would also like to thank the staff at the Institute of Criminology and Tony Ward from the School of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington. A special thanks to Carolina (who also provided the drawings for Figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5), Zoe, Leo, Mavis, and Bea.

VISUAL TOUR (HOW TO USE THIS BOOK)

Listed below are the various pedagogical features that can be found both in the margins and within the main text, with visual examples of the boxes to look out for, and descriptions of what you can expect them to contain.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Each chapter begins with a list of the key areas in which you can expect to gain knowledge through reading the chapter and completing the accompanying activities.

Review and reflect

Pause regularly to review what you have read so far and test your understanding of the material by answering key questions about the chapter.

REVIEW AND REFLECT

- 1 What role do genes play in the origin of criminal and antisocial behaviour?
- 2 What are neurotransmitters?
- 3 What are the implications of biological approaches for criminal culpability? Do you think that recent neuroscience implies a more lenient criminal justice system?

Boxed features

Boxed features appear throughout the text containing helpful extra material for students, such as case studies, discussion questions, and detailed explorations of concepts and real-life events mentioned in the text.

BOX 1.1 SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATIONS OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

Evolutionary explanations have a long and controversial history in the behavioural sciences (Plotkin, 2004), and many social scientists are sceptical of their value. However, although there are some legitimate concerns, there are also some issues to be addressed when applying evolutionary theory to criminal behaviour.

Activities

Activities to guide students in considering the wider implications of the concepts, examples or themes discussed in the chapter.

ACTIVITY 1.1 THE CAUSES OF CRIME

Rank the following five possible causes of crime in terms of how important you think they are in explaining criminal behaviour. For example, 'family environment' is the most important cause of crime, so you would rank it '1' next to family environment.

Cause

Research in Focus

Presents a detailed summary of a recent piece of empirical research in the area with a discussion of key methods and findings, connecting the material in the textbook back to the empirical research literature.



RESEARCH IN FOCUS 1.1 DOES CRIME RUN IN FAMILIES?

Title: The familial concentration and transmission of crime

Author: Beaver, K. M. **Year:** 2013

Source: *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 40, 139–155

Criminal Psychology Through Film

Provides a brief synopsis of a film relevant to the chapter content and encourages students to consider implications for our study of crime.



CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH FILM: *Out of the Blue* (2006)

Directed by: Robert Sarkies

Starring: Karl Urban (Nick Harvey), Matthew Sunderland, Simon Ferry (Garry Holden)

Chapter summaries

Each chapter ends with a concise summary of important concepts that have been discussed in the chapter.

Further reading

Annotated recommendations of additional readings and primary sources that will expand upon information covered in the chapter in greater depth.

Web resources

Links to online resources that complement and expand upon material covered in the chapter, and invite students to further their understanding of particular topics through additional exploration.

Key concepts

Lists of key concepts can be found at the end of each chapter to assist students in checking their knowledge of the important terms highlighted in each chapter.

Understanding criminal behaviour

An overview

CHAPTER OUTLINE

What is crime? 4

Measuring crime and criminal behaviour 5

What is criminal psychology? 8**The nature of explanation 9**

Explaining crime 9
Levels of analysis and explanations for crime 11

Evolutionary approaches 15

Key theoretical constructs 15
Evolutionary psychology 17
Evaluation 19

Social-structural and cultural approaches 20

Key theoretical approaches 20
Evaluation 22

Developmental approaches 22

Social learning theory 23
Developmental criminology 23
Evaluation 24

Psychological approaches 25

Personality 25
Cognition 28
Psychological disorders 29
Evaluation 30

Biological approaches 30

Genetic factors 31
Hormones and neurotransmitters 33
Neuropsychology 34
Evaluation 35

Situational approaches 36

The social environment 36
The physical environment and criminal opportunities 37
Evaluation 38

Summary 38

Further reading 41
Web resources 41
Key concepts 42

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

On completion of this chapter you should:

- have gained an understanding of what crime is and how it is measured;
- understand what criminal psychology is;
- recognise the importance of levels of analysis and the different types of explanations that they are associated with;
- have gained some understanding of the main types of explanation that will feature throughout this book, including:
 - evolutionary approaches
 - social-structural and cultural approaches
 - developmental approaches
 - psychological approaches
 - biological approaches
 - situational approaches.

Aromoana is a small town in New Zealand with a population of fewer than 300 individuals, located on the remote Otago Peninsula. On 13th and 14th November 1990 it was the location of New Zealand's worst mass murder (vividly depicted in the 2006 film *Out of the Blue* – see Criminal Psychology Through Film 1.1). Over a 34-hour period, local man David Gray ran riot through the town with a rifle shooting anyone that he came across. By the time that Gray was shot dead by the police he had murdered 13 residents and police officers and had wounded a further three individuals. Why did Gray commit this offence? Although this question is deceptively straightforward, providing a complete and coherent answer is not. There is a suggestion that Gray was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia so perhaps aspects of this mental disorder contributed to his offending. However, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the vast majority of individuals with major mental disorders like schizophrenia do not commit violent offences, let alone the kind perpetrated by Gray. Those who knew Gray also reported that he was socially isolated and was obsessed with weapons, war, and survival. Maybe then, something in Gray's mind set, or thinking patterns, contributed to the shooting spree. Prior to the shooting Gray had also had an argument with his neighbour, Gary Holden, over a dog that Gray spent a lot of time walking but Holden had to put down. Perhaps, then, this was an important precipitating or triggering factor. Certainly if Gray survived the mass murder we could ask him what motivated his shooting spree, but any answer that he could provide us would likely be less than complete. Part of the problem in our attempts to explain this mass murder is that we find it very hard to make the imaginative leap from our own minds to that of Gray (assuming that very few, if any, readers of this book have perpetrated a mass murder!). In order to fully understand this and other, more mundane, examples of criminal behaviour we also need to carefully think about the *type* of explanation that we offer. As we shall see in this chapter and throughout this book, a wide range of (often compatible) explanations have been offered to explain why individuals commit crime. In order to understand criminal behaviour, it will be argued, we need to take all of these types of explanation into account.



CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH FILM 1.1

Out of the Blue (2006)

Directed by: Robert Sarkies

Starring: Karl Urban (Nick Harvey), Matthew Sunderland (David Gray), and Simon Ferry (Garry Holden)

This film vividly depicts the sequence of events as they unfolded on November 13, 1990, in the small coastal settlement of Aramoana on the Otago peninsula. This remote setting was the scene of New Zealand's worst mass murder when local man, David Gray, went on a shooting rampage killing 13 individuals before being shot by police. The film tracks the sequence of events leading up to the mass murder as David Gray, angry over an incident at a bank in town, turns to his cache of weapons and starts shooting members of the community of which he is a part.

Question for discussion

What motivated David Gray to perpetrate this mass shooting? Watch the film and note down the potentially relevant psychological and situational factors that might have played a role.

For further discussion

The residents of Aramoana were strongly opposed to the production of this film and refused permission for it to be filmed in the settlement itself. Some of the police officers were also upset about the way they were depicted in the film. When making films of this nature is there an obligation for filmmakers to adhere to the 'facts', and should those most affected by the actual events have a say in whether the film should go ahead?

The aim of this chapter is to provide a conceptual overview of the various different types of explanation that we will encounter throughout the rest of the book. First, however, we need to take a little time to explain just what we mean by 'crime' and 'criminal behaviour' and how these are defined and measured. We will also discuss the specific contribution of **criminal psychology** to the task of understanding offending. We then consider how the different types of explanation for crime can be organised in a conceptually coherent fashion and introduce some of the main approaches that will feature throughout the rest of this book.

WHAT IS CRIME?

Almost without fail every introductory textbook in criminology begins by addressing this question. The reason for this is pretty straightforward: it is essential that we are clear about the phenomenon that we are studying before we embark on detailed accounts of that phenomenon. What, then, is this thing called crime? The most straightforward approach is to define crime in legal terms. Thus, Munice and McLaughlin (2001, p. 10) define crime as 'an act or omission punishable by law', and Wikström (2006, p. 63) views crime as 'an act of breaking a moral rule defined in criminal law'. This approach to defining crime has some clear advantages. Most importantly, as long as we have a clear understanding of the criminal law then we will be able to determine with a reasonably high degree of confidence what constitutes criminal behaviour. However, as criminologists have noted, criminal law is far from static, and thus crime is a 'moving target': what constitutes a criminal act depends on when and where it is committed (Newburn, 2013). In short, crime is considered to be a socially constructed class of acts, rather than something that is a 'given' feature of the world. Examples are not hard to come by. The use of various drugs, gambling, homosexuality, prostitution, and spousal rape are all acts that have been punishable by the law (and thus 'criminal') in some times and places but not in others.

This poses an apparent problem for psychological explanations of criminal behaviour. As Wortley (2011, p. 4) notes, 'If someone can be a criminal today but not tomorrow for the same behaviour, then how can anything meaningful be said about their criminal nature'. To address this issue, the criminologist Robert Agnew (2011, p. 187) proposes that crime should be defined as 'acts that cause blameworthy harm, are condemned by the public, and/or are sanctioned by the state'. This definition helps to shift the burden away from acts that are currently proscribed by the law to a wider range of harmful behaviours. A similar way of resolving this problem is to focus more broadly on 'deviant' or 'antisocial' behaviour – that is, behaviour that violates social norms – rather than criminal behaviour per se. Many psychologists, for instance, focus their attention on 'antisocial behaviour', and we will use this term widely throughout this book. Inevitably, of course, there is a significant overlap in what we consider to be 'antisocial' and what we consider to be 'criminal' behaviour although the overlap is not so complete that we can't meaningfully use the term 'criminal *and* antisocial' behaviour.

In many respects the issues in defining crime – important as they are – will not significantly hamper our efforts in this book to provide explanations for criminal behaviour. In part, this is because we are largely concerned with explaining what criminologists term *male in se*, or 'core' offences – those that tend to be viewed as more serious, are culturally and historically less relative, and are subject to more severe penalties (Walsh & Ellis, 2007). Murder, rape, serious assault, and robbery are all examples of *male in se* offences. We will also consider a variety of acts that may not always be considered as criminal, including aggressive behaviour, drug use, war, and various types of 'green' crimes. However, these topics are important because either they are related to more serious criminal acts (e.g., violence) or, although not necessarily violations of the law, they may cause significant amounts of harm (e.g., war, 'green' crimes).

Measuring crime and criminal behaviour

The task of measuring crime is important for a wide range of different reasons. Most straightforwardly we are interested in determining just how much crime there is in society and how prevalent different types of crime are. Inevitably we will also be interested in finding out whether crime is increasing or decreasing and whether crime is more prevalent in some places than others. Obtaining clear information about the nature and prevalence of crime in society is also important for the development of theories of crime. A good theory of crime, for instance, will provide a satisfactory account of the most notable patterns in criminal behaviour, such as the over-representation of men and young people in crime statistics. In short, we want to ensure that we have a clear picture of the phenomenon that we want to explain.

Criminologists typically recognise two main approaches to measuring crime: **official crime statistics** and **victim surveys**. Official crime statistics are those that are gathered by law enforcement agencies and are based on offences that are reported to, or otherwise come to the attention of, the relevant law enforcement authorities. All Western countries meticulously collect and publish official crime statistics on a regular basis. In England and Wales these are known as *recorded crime statistics* and are published alongside the results from the *British Crime Survey* (a victim survey – see below). In the United States the official crime statistics are collected by the FBI and are published as the *Uniform Crime Reports*. Recorded crime in New Zealand is presented as *New Zealand Police Statistics*, and in Australia these are held at the *Australian Bureau of Statistics*. These and the official crime statistics from other countries are readily accessible online.

Official crime statistics provide important information about the prevalence of different types of offences in society, and we will draw upon them throughout this book. They do, however, have some well-recognised limitations. Importantly, because they are largely based on criminal offences either that are reported to the police or that the police find out about through other means, they inevitably represent only a *sample* of the total amount of crime in society. The reason for this is straightforward: many offences are simply not reported to the police, and thus they cannot find their way into official crime statistics. Criminologists use the term 'the **dark figure of crime**' to refer to those unreported and undetected offences. To make matters more problematic, some offences are more likely to be reported to, or detected by, the police than are others. Property offences, for instance, such as burglary or motor vehicle theft, are likely to be reported to police as people will typically want to make insurance claims on lost items. Many offences against the person, however, such as sexual and violent offences, may be less likely to be reported as many people may view these as private matters or think that the police will not be able to do anything to help them (Bradley & Walters, 2011; Newburn, 2013). These and other reasons also remind us that we should take care in interpreting trends in official crime statistics over time. The release of the latest crime statistics is typically a newsworthy event, and – if crime rates are seen to be going down – they are often the cause for some mutual backslapping among the incumbent government and law enforcement agencies. However, fluctuations in official crime statistics can occur for a number of reasons that may have little to do with actual rates of crime in society. It is important to keep in mind, therefore, that despite their usefulness, official crime statistics may not necessarily provide the most accurate picture of crime in society (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 The limitations of official crime statistics

<i>Limitation</i>		<i>Implications</i>
Unreported crimes are not counted	If crimes are not reported to or detected by police then they will not find their way into the police-recorded statistics	There is a substantial 'dark figure' of crime that includes all those offences that are not reported to police
Not all reported crimes are recorded	Police have substantial discretion in deciding whether or not to record a specific incident	There is a significant 'grey figure' of crime represented by reported but not recorded crime
Reporting rates vary by crime type	Some offences are more likely to be reported than others (e.g., property offences)	Police-recorded crime statistics do not provide a good indication of the relative prevalence of different types of crime
Trends in crime are influenced by a range of factors	Changes in legislation, recording practices, reporting practices, and police numbers and practices all can affect the volume of reported crime	Changes in recorded crime may not accurately portray actual changes in the amount of crime in society over time
Cross-national comparisons are problematic	Different countries have different recording practices, crime types, policing practices, and so forth	With some exceptions it is difficult to compare overall rates of crime between different countries

A second common approach for measuring crime in society is the victim survey. Victim surveys involve obtaining information about the experience of victimisation from a representative sample of the population over a particular time period (usually a year). Researchers are then able to extrapolate from the information provided in victim surveys to estimate how much crime (or, rather, victimisation) there has been in a country as a whole over the relevant time period. Most Western countries also fairly regularly administer victim surveys. In England and Wales this information is captured in the *British Crime Survey*, and in the United States the equivalent survey is referred to as *National Crime Victimization Survey*. The most recent victimisation survey in New Zealand is the New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey (NZCASS) 2015, and Australia conducts an annual *Crime Victimization Survey*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, victim surveys reveal a great deal more crime than are captured in official crime statistics, thus shedding some light on the 'dark figure' of crime. In addition to regular national crime victimisation surveys there are also a plethora of typically more local or more crime-specific victim surveys that attempt to capture the experience of victimisation for certain types of offence or in certain regions. Although victim surveys are enormously useful for understanding crime in society, like official crime statistics they also have their limitations. For example, because they rely on the reporting of victimisation from the public they are subject to the natural limitations of human memory. Moreover, some people may be reluctant to talk about their experiences of victimisation, particularly if they involve sexual offences (see Figure 1.1).

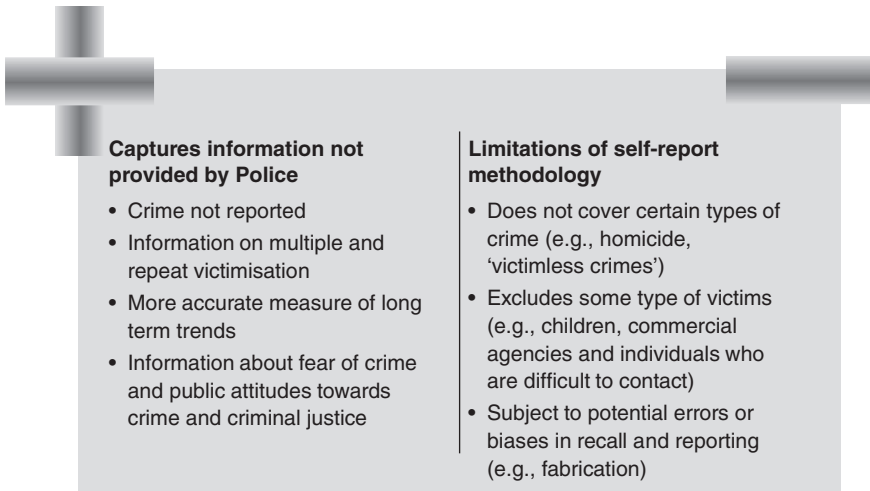


Figure 1.1 The advantages and disadvantages of victim surveys.

A third type of study that we will make use of in this book is the self-report study. Whereas victim surveys obtain information about experiences of victimisation, self-report studies involve obtaining information from individuals about their experience as offenders. Self-report studies are often employed as part of longitudinal research designs that track individuals over time and may be particularly useful in mapping changes in offence rates over time for the same individuals (Newburn, 2013). They are also widely used for offences like illicit drug use, which are poorly represented in both official crime statistics and victim surveys. Inevitably, although self-report studies can provide valuable information that may be missed in other types of research, they are limited by the sample employed and the willingness of individuals to disclose information about illegal activities.

Given the strengths and limitations of the three types of approach for measuring crime and criminal behaviour, how should we go about determining the nature and prevalence of crime in society? As with other types of research enquiry, the best approach is to draw on a diverse range of research methods rather than to rely predominantly or exclusively on one source of data. If we can demonstrate similar patterns across different sources of data then we are in a stronger position to claim that the particular phenomenon that we are interested in is a 'robust' one and not simply an artefact of the particular source of data. Throughout this book we will draw on a range of different sources of information about crime, alongside various different research methodologies for understanding criminal behaviour.

REVIEW AND REFLECT

- 1 How would *you* define 'crime'?
- 2 What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of using official crime statistics?

WHAT IS CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY?

This book is centrally concerned with the application of psychology to our understanding of criminal behaviour. Let us pause for a moment to reflect on what this actually entails. As every introductory psychology textbook will quickly tell us, psychology is 'the science of mental processes and behavior' (e.g., Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2004, p. 4). Criminology textbooks are rather less concise or uniform in how they define their discipline, but, broadly speaking, criminology is defined as the study of crime, criminal behaviour, and responses to crime (e.g., Newburn, 2013). Criminal psychology, then, critically involves the use of psychology as a science to advance our understanding of the causes of crime. Psychology here refers to the academic discipline of psychology (which includes the study, among other things, of brain processes, development, cognition, personality, social influence, and culture) not just peoples' thinking process and personality (as in the *psychological level of analysis* discussed below). Unfortunately, although there is some agreement regarding the boundaries of 'psychology' and 'criminology', there is no such consensus on what is meant by 'criminal psychology', and there are a number of overlapping terms that are also employed including 'forensic psychology' 'psychological criminology', 'criminological psychology', and 'legal psychology'.

For some (e.g., Blackburn, 1996), the term 'forensic psychology' refers specifically to the application of psychology to the legal system – as reflected in the etymology of the word 'forensic', as 'pertaining to the courts of law'. Other scholars offer a more narrow interpretation of 'forensic psychology' as the 'practice of clinical psychology to the legal system' (Huss, 2009, p. 5). To complicate matters, the term 'forensic psychology' is also used more broadly to embrace the application of psychology to virtually anything related to crime, including our understanding of the causes of crime. Davies, Hollin, and Bull (2008, p. XIII) for instance, suggest that forensic psychology is a 'broach church', with:

two main aisles: legal psychology covering the application of psychological knowledge and methods to the process of law and criminological psychology dealing with the application of psychological theory and method to the understanding (and reduction) of criminal behaviour.

To confuse matters further, the application of psychology to the investigation of crime and, in particular, the profiling of offenders is sometimes referred to as 'investigative psychology' (Canter & Youngs, 2009), or when coupled with the use of psychology in the training and selection of police the term 'police psychology' can be used (Bartol & Bartol, 2012).

Finally, when psychology is used in prison contexts for the assessment and rehabilitation of offenders it is often called 'correctional psychology' (Bartol & Bartol, 2012).

In the end analysis labels are important because they can help to define what it means to be a criminal or a forensic psychologist, and what people *expect* from this role (Brown, Shell, & Cole, 2015). However, for the purposes of this book it is probably best to think in terms of the specific domains of inquiry and application, rather than get bogged down with what labels should be employed. In other words, we will be focusing on what psychologists have found out about the nature of crime and the criminal justice process and how this knowledge can be most usefully applied. Thus, we will be using the term 'criminal psychology' as the application of psychology as an academic discipline to our understanding of the causes of criminal behaviour (roughly equivalent to Wortley's, 2011, use of the term 'psychological criminology', or Hollin's, 2013, use of the term 'criminological psychology') leaving the term 'forensic psychology' to describe the application of psychology to the legal system.

THE NATURE OF EXPLANATION

Explaining crime

I spent many years teaching university courses in psychology, and when people asked me what I did for a living, the reply 'psychologist' often evoked a defensive reaction, and responses along the lines of 'so you are probably psychoanalysing me right now' were not uncommon. Typically the conversation ended in a somewhat uneasy silence (especially when I responded with a stony-faced 'yes!'). However, since becoming a 'criminologist' I have been astounded at how readily people – often complete strangers – want to tell me their thoughts and feelings on the main causes of crime and how to address the crime 'problem'. Given the attention paid by the media to crime, and the real harms that arise from criminal behaviour, the interest that people have in crime is perhaps not too surprising. Inevitably when people do think about the topic of crime they gravitate towards two fundamental questions: 'why does it occur?' and 'how can it be prevented?' These two questions are, of course, related. One of the reasons that we want to advance our understanding of the causes of crime is because if we know why crime occurs then we will be in a better position to implement approaches to preventing or reducing crime. Specific types of explanation for crime also suggest different ways of responding to crime. If, for instance, you believe that criminals are inherently 'bad' or 'evil' and thus are irredeemable then you are likely to favour responses that involve locking them in prison for as long as possible. On the other hand, if you think that criminal behaviour is related to the way that offenders think about the world then you might support the implementation of rehabilitation programmes designed to change thinking patterns. In short, our theories of crime matter.

Before we start looking at the major theoretical approaches to understanding crime, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider what *you* think are the main causes of crime. Before reading further, complete Activity 1.1.