

Chapter 1

An Overview of the Psychology of Criminal Conduct

A course in the psychology of crime will attract a wide range of students including students from outside of psychology and indeed part-timers from outside the university setting. Indeed some instructors will not be psychologists but social workers, sociologists, criminologists, lawyers, or educational specialists. We welcome one and all. Interest in crime and criminals is not narrow in focus, and experts abound. Crime and criminals receive extraordinary attention from the news media and from the arts, entertainment, and humanities communities.

Let's face it: The science of crime is a very small domain compared to that covered by the press and within literature, television, and the movies. Students arrive at the course thinking that the psychology of crime is primarily about mental illness or poverty or racism (or criminal profiling, imposing just punishment, cops and robbers, serial murderers, or about mental health approaches to rehabilitation). Thus, Chapters 1 and 2 take some time to chart the outlines of the course of study. Along the way, multiple concrete examples are provided of theoretical ideas, research findings, and practical applications to be developed throughout the book.

In Chapter 1 the following major theme is stressed: The focus of the psychology of criminal conduct (PCC) is understanding variation in the criminal behavior of individuals. The three types of understanding sought are research-based, practical, and theoretical. In brief, we seek a theoretical explanation that is evidence-based and of applied value. This opens up opportunities for exciting classroom discussions of what "variation" refers to, what is "explanation," how do we collect and evaluate evidence, and how the knowledge might be applied.

- Types of variation: inter-individual and intra-individual.
- Elements of empirical understanding:
 - 1) the nature and extent of variation at the level of individuals (substantial)
 - 2) differentiation and prediction (knowledge of risk, strength, and criminogenic need factors)
 - 3) the ability to influence criminal behavior (knowledge of the effects of deliberate and controlled interventions through official punishment or through the delivery of human services)
 - 4) the inter-correlations among risk-need factors
- Elements of theoretical understanding: generality, rationality, simple as possible, emotionally pleasing, empirically accurate.
- Practical understanding: applying our theoretical and evidence-based knowledge to the achievement of personally and socially valued outcomes.
- The measurement of level of covariation: The Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) is a measure of level of covariation or predictive accuracy or the magnitude of the effect of a particular intervention. We strongly recommend that the Binomial Effect

Size Display be underscored in lectures (see Resource Note 1.1 in the text).

Additionally in Chapter 1, PCC is located within general human psychology, within criminology, and within criminal justice. Psychology incorporates at least eight identifiable orientations (e.g., biological, trait, etc.), but they all share four unifying principles: (1) the individual as unit of analysis, (2) openness to a wide range of potential correlates of criminal conduct, (3) a rational empirical approach, and (4) building knowledge within an ethical context. Our understanding of criminal behavior is furthered through systematic research (“empirical understanding”), logical and rational explanations (“theoretical understanding”), and evaluations of efforts in assessment, treatment, and the prevention of criminal behavior (“practical understanding”).

In Chapter 1, as we will show at many points in the text, mainstream sociological criminology had considerable difficulty with the psychology of crime for decades. In the process, criminology devalued the importance of rational empiricism and often practiced theoreticism. Theoreticism is the acceptance or rejection of evidence based upon one’s ideological position or personal interests. Criminology has long held that social location variables such as social class-of-origin are major causes of crime. Nonsupportive evidence for these factors has been dismissed, while supportive evidence has been readily accepted despite serious methodological weaknesses. (While the construct of “theoreticism” is developed in Technical Note 2.3 in the text, we recommend that instructors introduce it in their lectures.)

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. According to the text, understanding individual behavior is gained through
 - a. theory
 - b. research
 - c. practice
 - d. (b) and (c) only
 - * e. all of the above

2. Intraindividual differences refer to differences
 - a. between individuals
 - * b. within an individual in different situations
 - c. experimental and control groups

- d. in an individual's attitudes and personality
 - e. between an individual and the social group
3. There are eight major orientations in the psychology of human behavior. The social learning approach is characterized by
- a. psychoanalytic ideas
 - b. free choice and personal growth
 - c. the influence of peers
 - d. effects of rewards and punishment on overt behavior
 - * e. observational learning, situational influence, and cognition
4. According to the text, risk-taking
- a. is unrelated to crime
 - b. is found only among unemployed delinquents
 - * c. adds information beyond socioeconomic status (SES) and gender in correlations with crime
 - d. provides information equal to SES and gender
 - e. is a male personality characteristic
5. Gough's Socialization (So) scale is related to crime in
- a. North American samples
 - b. North America and Western Europe
 - c. India
 - d. (a) and (b) only
 - * e. all of the above
6. Rational empiricism involves
- a. logically coherent but untestable constructs
 - b. the study of individuals instead of social structure
 - * c. systematic observations
 - d. unethical experimental manipulations
 - e. extensive theorizing
7. A major characteristic of the psychology of criminal conduct is the emphasis upon
- * a. individual behavior
 - b. psychoanalysis as a treatment strategy
 - c. the measurement of social structure (e.g., class)
 - d. establishing correlational relationships
 - e. the role of the victim and the law's response to crime
8. Criminal behavior is the _____ within a PCC.

- *
 - a. criterion
 - b. independent variable
 - c. minor variable of interest
 - d. theoretical variable
 - e. predictor

- 9. Observing that your friend becomes aggressive only when drinking is an example of observing
 - a. interindividual differences
 - b. the experimental method
 - * c. intraindividual differences
 - d. over-controlled hostility
 - e. theoretical understanding

- 10. A fictional study finds that 70 percent of criminals and 40 percent of noncriminals had tattoos. The approximate correlation between tattoos and criminal status is
 - a. 0.70
 - * b. 0.30
 - c. -0.70
 - d. -0.30
 - e. 0.40

- 11. A Pearson product correlation coefficient is a statistical measure of
 - a. significance
 - * b. the magnitude of the association
 - c. mediating influence
 - d. the representativeness of the sample
 - e. probability

- 12. In a PCC, variability is evidenced by
 - a. interindividual differences
 - b. intraindividual differences
 - c. differences in behavior over time
 - d. differences in behavior in different situations
 - * e. all of the above

Short-Answer Questions

1. Discuss social context as a potential moderator of personal risk factors in

relation to criminal behavior and provide an illustration that incorporates research findings.

Scoring Key:

Social context factors such as social class and neighborhood characteristics may (or may not) influence how personal risk factors are associated with criminal behavior. An example from the chapter is the study by Hagan et al. showing that personality (risk-taking) is more important than social class in the prediction of criminal behavior and depends little upon the social class of the person. Similarly, a measure of personal and interpersonal risk/need factors was much more strongly correlated with serious offending than was the socio-economic characteristics of neighborhoods (a study by Rolf Loeber and colleagues).

2. What are the three types of understanding sought by the psychology of criminal conduct (PCC)? Briefly describe each.

Scoring Key:

The three types of understanding are:

- 1) empirical: systematic observations of the correlates or covariates of criminal behavior.
 - 2). theoretical: general, rational, empirically accurate explanations of criminal behavior.
 - 3) practical: knowledge from the prediction and control/treatment of criminal behavior.
3. Note four of the eight general orientations that are available to PCC as a result of being part of a general human psychology.

Scoring Key:

The eight orientations are: (1) biological, (2) trait, (3) psychodynamic, (4) sociocultural, (5) radical behavioral, (6) humanistic–existential, (7) social learning/cognitive behavioral/social cognition, and (8) general personality and social psychological perspective.

4. What are the four unifying principles within a general human psychology?

Scoring Key:

They are: (1) focus on individuals, (2) openness to a range of correlates,

(3) commitment to a rational–empirical approach, and (4) ethical/professional approach to knowledge building.

5. You are asked to design a study that will evaluate the effectiveness of a program that teaches parents how to decrease the incidence of swearing by their children. Forty families with “mouthy” children have volunteered to participate in the evaluation of this “dirty word reduction” training program. Design a study to evaluate the functional validity of the treatment program, making sure that you attend to the key methodological factors.

Scoring Key:

Marks are given for a description of the key features of an experimental design. Each of the following features should be described:

- a) Random assignment of families
- b) At a minimum, there will be at least one treatment group and one control group
- b) Comparison of outcome for the experimental and control groups
- c) Use of objective measurement

Chapter 2

The Empirical Base of PCC and the RNR Model of Assessment and Crime Prevention Through Human Services

This lengthy chapter provides an overview of the major risk/need factors that have been supported through research along with the research findings regarding effective crime prevention services in work with offenders. Both the prediction of criminal behavior and crime prevention services are integrated within what has come to be known as the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model of correctional assessment and treatment.

Students should be advised that they are not expected to absorb all the information contained in Chapter 2. They are expected to develop an understanding of the core risk-need-responsivity principles and to have an appreciation for the “Central Eight” risk/need domains without having to recreate Table 2.1 or Table 2.5 of the text. Similarly, they should have an appreciation of the state of the literature on effective correctional treatment without yet being able to provide details with regard to the evidence base for each of the RNR principles.

Meta-analyses of the Correlates of Crime and of the Effects of Deliberate Intervention

Chapter 2 ends with a description of the use of meta-analysis to review a body of research findings. Meta-analysis is a quantitative approach to summarizing the literature, and this approach is quickly replacing the more traditional narrative literature review. The results from different studies are converted into a common metric (often a correlation coefficient), thereby facilitating comparisons across studies and estimating the magnitude of the relationships among variables of interest. Throughout the text, numerous examples of meta-analytic reviews are presented.

The meta-analyses in Chapter 2 provide concise summaries of the research findings in regard to the two primary issues of an empirical understanding of criminal behavior. They are identification of risk-need factors and demonstrating the ability to influence the occurrence of criminal activity.

Risk-need. The meta-analyses in regard to risk-need, including a meta-analysis of eight meta-analyses, provide support for the “Central Eight” risk-need factors. Within the Central Eight, the “Big Four” are the most important of the major risk-need factors.

Note that the narrative summary of the Central Eight includes a more dense set of risk descriptors than what is required at the introductory stage. Students will return to Table 2.5 in the text on many occasions as they make their way through the course. Note in Resource Note 2.1 in the text that the findings are explored by gender, age, race, measure of crime, and type of research design. This illustrates the search for the wide applicability or

generality of the findings.

Table 2.6 in the text is extraordinary in illustrating the strength and robustness of the meta-analytic findings across meta-analytic reviews. Not only does it highlight the predictive validity of assessments of the Big Four and the whole of the Central Eight, it shows how relatively poorly lower-class origins and personal distress predict crime. It will also provide the student with a sense of what we can expect from an assessment of one of the Big Four in relation to crime (an r of approximately .26). The mean value drops to an r of .17 for one of the other members of the Central Eight. The mean r for the minor factors was not even statistically different from zero. Combining the Central Eight into an overall total risk score (with the LS/CMI) yields a mean predictive validity estimate slightly over .40.

The effectiveness of correctional treatment. Once again the “nothing works” position of mainstream criminology is found very weak once the research evidence is actually reviewed. The findings are not at all supportive of the crime-reducing value of official punishment.

The findings. Technical Note 2.3 in the text is an intellectually serious but deliberately humorous look at the anti-rehabilitation arguments once made in response to what is now overwhelming meta-analytic evidence in favor of rehabilitation programs that are in adherence with risk-need-responsivity.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. A covariate of criminal behavior suggests
 - a. a causal relationship
 - * b. that the variable is associated with criminal behavior
 - c. a functional relationship
 - d. the control of behavior
 - e. both (a) and (c)

2. Changing an offender’s criminogenic needs in a treatment program is an example of
 - a. a pre-service client characteristic
 - b. an interaction effect
 - c. a moderator variable
 - * d. an intermediate treatment goal
 - e. program processes

3. A quantitative summary of a research topic is referred to as a
 - a. research review
 - b. qualitative summary

- * c. meta-analysis
 - d. Pearson correlation review
 - e. critical analysis
4. Evidence for the effectiveness of offender rehabilitation first became evident with the literature review conducted by
- a. Andrews, Zinger et al. (1990)
 - b. Gendreau and Ross (1987)
 - c. Gendreau and Ross (1979)
 - d. Martinson (1974)
 - * e. Kirby (1954)
5. The mean predictive validity (r) estimates for the minor, moderate, Big Four, and total risk scores are as follows
- | | | | | |
|------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| * a. | .00 | .17 | .26 | .40 |
| b. | -.20 | .00 | .15 | .70 |
| c. | .00 | .15 | .50 | .98 |
| d. | .00 | .30 | .50 | .80 |
| e. | .00 | .00 | .25 | .40 |
6. Changing an offender's criminogenic needs in a treatment program is an example of
- a. a pre-service client characteristic
 - b. an interaction effect
 - c. a moderator variable
 - * d. an intermediate treatment goal
 - e. program processes

Short-Answer Questions

1. List the Big Four risk-need factors.

Scoring Key: (order is not important)

- 1) A history of antisocial behavior
- 2) Antisocial personality pattern
- 3) Antisocial attitudes
- 4) Antisocial associates

2. List the remaining risk-need factors in the Central Eight

Scoring Key: (order is not important)

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- 1) Family/marital problems
- 2) Problems at school/work
- 3) Problems in the domain of leisure/recreation
- 4) Substance abuse

3. How is it possible that a variable could be both a risk factor and a strength factor?

Scoring Key:

Any particular variable (for example, parent-child relationships) may be very positive, neutral, or very negative. If delinquency rates are increased for negative relationships relative to the neutral condition, it is a risk factor. If delinquency rates are lower for positive relationships relative to the neutral condition, it is a strength factor.

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