

Introduction

Ray Bull

Forensic psychology is a major growth area of psychology having a strong 'real world' impact in a considerable number of countries. In some countries (e.g. Japan, Korea) it has recently begun to do so, and in a few more (e.g. Brazil, Zambia) a start is being made. Its popularity with graduate and undergraduate students continues to expand at a fast rate. This four-volume collection brings together publications that serve to define forensic psychology. It contains a representative mix of classic articles and recent publications previously published (in English) in a wide variety of different journals. Some of the articles have been chosen because of the quality of their coverage and others for their ingenuity and/or appropriate accounts of how complicated forensic psychology topics/analyses often need to be. This collection is a foundation resource and first point of reference for institutions and individuals who seek to build their knowledge and expertise.

This first of the four volumes has a major focus on accounts of explanations for offending. Given that 'offending' includes a great variety of crimes and that around the world millions of people are 'offenders', it should not be surprising that there exists a considerable variety of explanations. One task for the reader of this volume is to consider which of these explanations might contradict each other and which might be complementary.

In his article, Akers contends that the (then rather new) 'Rational Choice Theory' of criminal behaviour offers little extra than does the more well-established 'Social Learning' explanation. The notion of rational choice (see the article by Cornish and Clarke in this volume) evolved from models in economics and assumes that people weigh up the positive and negative consequences of their possible actions before deciding what to do. This notion differs from those theories that emphasise the pathological or irrational causes of crime commission. Akers voices his concern that proponents of (i) various criminological theories, and (ii) the literature on rational choice has ignored social learning theory. Akers contends that it is unlikely that would-be offenders adopt a highly rational approach to (possible) crime commission

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(partly because much human decision-making involves non-rational elements, as found in much relevant psychological research), but he is willing to subsume an element of rational choice into a modern behavioural approach (which does not contend that individuals are passively conditioned).

Farrington's article presents a remarkable study in which eight-year-old boys from certain schools in London have been followed up at various stages until the age of 32 (when there was still an over 90% participation rate). This study found that the childhood factors most predictive of later criminality included large family size, low family income, poor child rearing, a convicted parent, low school attainment, high impulsivity, but not low socio-economic status. In the light of such findings a theory was developed which contended that criminal behaviour is due to (i) a desire for material goods, excitement, and status; (ii) choosing illegal methods to obtain them; (iii) beliefs developed via social learning; (iv) the perceived costs and benefits; and (v) the consequences of offending. Farrington then proposed some methods of preventing offending that in childhood involve parental training/education and preschool intellectual enrichment programmes.

For several decades, Hans Eysenck energetically put forward the view that criminal behaviour is largely related to personality rather than what he refers to as 'sociological' factors. Indeed, he contends that sociological theories are typically non-testable and are too imprecise to allow quantitative predictions. The theory in which he sees research as supporting involves three dimensions, namely psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism. Regarding individual differences between people, he argues that where a person fits on these dimensions is the result of variations in arousal which he believes to be considerably affected by genetic factors. Such variations, in turn, affect how responsive people are to conditioning and thus the strength of the conscience they develop. Conscience, he says, relates to why people behave in a socially desirable way. Eysenck argues that permissiveness results in parents/society not conditioning children appropriately and failing to use punishment effectively.

Jeffery's article is included in this volume largely because it clearly sets out how, decades ago, a rather behaviouristic notion of learning theory might be applied to explain criminality. He also addresses the issues of the effects of associating with criminals and why punishment has not been effective.

Schoenfeld's article adopts a perspective that initially seems very different from the articles that precede it in this volume. It contends that one key psychoanalytic concept (the superego), when not properly developed so as to be able to control the ego, can be used, in part, to explain juvenile delinquency. Appropriate development of the superego (the internalised parent) is seen as dependent on methods of child rearing (e.g. parental affection, lax discipline, low socio-economic status – but see Farrington's article in this

volume). Forty years ago in this article Schoenfeld pioneeringly called for more research on the effects of child rearing.

With regard to the causes of serious violent offending, the article by Davey and colleagues contends that there is an important distinction to be made between offenders who have low levels of anger control (the traditional explanation) and those who have high levels (being over controlled). The latter may be characterised as experiencing (not necessarily often) a build-up of anger that eventually can lead to very violent offending. These authors point out that over-controllers may not believe themselves to have an anger problem (because they may rarely experience anger) and thus may be low in readiness for treatment. An explanation of this is offered in terms of models of emotional regulation that have lately been developed.

One explanation for crime taking place focuses on the situational opportunities for offending. This explanation allows for reducing crime by changing situations (e.g. via defensible space architecture). However, such a notion has been criticised by those who support the dispositional basis for offending as merely resulting in the displacement of offending to other situations. Cornish and Clarke suggest that a rational choice theory of offending (i.e. people make decisions as to whether to offend) can be used to devise interventions that could result in less displacement by altering the perceived costs and benefits of offending, though in this classic article they noted that then little was known about the decision-making of offenders.

One enduring belief concerning the causes of criminality is that offending is largely genetically determined. In their article Dalgard and Kringlen report their Norwegian study of all twins born between 1900 and 1935 who were mentioned in the national crime register up to 1966. Like some previous smaller studies, they wanted to find out if the concordance within identical twins was greater than within non-identical twins. The prior studies found higher concordance for identical twins, thus supporting a genetic explanation. However, in their own study these authors found no significant differences between the types of twins. They offered extensive criticism of the previous studies in attempting to explain why their conclusion was different.

Another explanation of offending focuses on moral reasoning. Palmer notes that research over previous decades had established a link between moral reasoning and offending. In her article, she addresses the topic of the psychological processes that may be involved relating these to childhood experience. Children who are treated harshly may develop a hostile internal model of the world such that, for example, ambiguous social cues are interpreted negatively causing aggression/antisocial behaviour. Other people's responses to this behaviour may not only cause matters to escalate but also to justify the internal model.

Monahan explores the supposed link between violent behaviour and mental disorder. He points out that members of the general public believed

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that there is such a link, whereas many professionals, including himself, did not. However, the recent research he overviews caused him to change his mind. He notes that this topic is important for several reasons including how people interact with those with mental disorder and the laws designed to control violence behaviour. Relevant research has examined (i) the prevalence of violence in persons with mental disorder, and (ii) the prevalence of mental disorder among the violent. The recent research which led him to change his view took into account many demographic and social factors.

The possible link between offending and intellectual disability is explored by Holland and colleagues who make the valid point that the definitions of both these terms may well affect the extent of their association. This crucial point concerning definitions applies widely to explanations of/for criminality, especially because a considerable amount of offending is never reported to the authorities. The authors make a distinction between challenging behaviour and criminal behaviour. They note that the proportion of prisoners who have intellectual disability is very low, whereas much better predictors of contact with the criminal justice system are maleness and youth.

Moffitt makes the point that, in the past, research on antisocial behaviour that included aspects of offending had usually compared delinquents with non-delinquents and found an association of sorts between age and antisocial behaviour that remains to be adequately explained. Some people seem to demonstrate antisocial behaviour for decades whereas many others do so only during adolescence. She presents an explanation that whereas the former group's behaviour is the result of childhood neuropsychological problems interacting with their criminogenic environments, the latter group's is due to a gap between adolescents' biological and social maturity leading the socially immature to mimic antisocial models.

Wells and Rankin pointed out that prior research on the association between broken homes and delinquency found effects, but the nature of these varied. They present a meta-analysis of 50 studies which confirmed that the presence of delinquency in such homes was around 10 percent to 15 percent higher. This association was stronger for minor offending and weaker for major offending (e.g. interpersonal violence), though juvenile gender had no effect. Step-parenting was not consistently found to be important. Delinquency as found in official/institutional data was more strongly associated with broken homes than it was for self-reported delinquency.

Hollin and Palmer provide a clear explanation of the 'risk-needs' model of offending which is based on the notion that crime results from an interaction between personal and situational factors. The personal factors involve criminogenic needs that relate to the risk of offending. Some risk factors are static whereas others are dynamic, the latter being the criminogenic needs (e.g. substance abuse). Changes within individuals in such needs relate to their likelihood of offending. Their review paper focuses on whether such criminogenic needs differ between men and women. They conclude

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that although there are probably similar needs for both genders, having been abused (sexually or physically) is more common for women. Such abuse leads to personal problems which lead to criminogenic needs.

Levi presents an interesting, personal view regarding the relative neglect of concerns about what to do about white-collar crime (including its causes). This neglect in the media, he contends, leads to a biased view of what needs to be done to reduce offending. The media focus, partly due to reliance on official sources, on crimes involving violence (e.g. rape or murder) not only enhances fear of such crimes, it also takes emphasis away from crimes that may well affect more people (e.g. organised fraud and cyber crime).

The types of crimes committed by psychopaths were compared by Williamson and colleagues with those committed by non-psychopaths. If crimes differ between the two groups, then psychopathy as a cause of offending might be better understood. For male prisoners in Canadian jails for a federal prison sentence (i.e. of at least two years) the researchers compared the crimes committed by 46 non-psychopaths and 55 psychopaths (as defined by a checklist – they provided a definition of psychopathy). The psychopaths seldom committed violent crimes (i) under the influence of strong emotions, or (ii) against females or people known to them, whereas the opposite was the case for the non-psychopaths, who have stronger friend and family attachments than do psychopaths.

Fisher and colleagues, like Williamson and colleagues, compared a large group of criminals (child molesters of 'high' and 'low' deviancy) with another group (newly recruited male prison officers) in order to better understand offending. They found the child molesters to show deficits in victim empathy, more personal distress and emotional loneliness, and lower self esteem. Furthermore, the high deviancy offenders differed from the low deviancy offenders regarding cognitive distortions and emotional congruence, perspective taking and assertiveness. Also, in the prison officers there was some distorted thinking regarding children and some victim-blaming attitudes.