

Definitions and Concepts for AQA Psychology A-level

Option 3: Forensic Psychology

Anger management: Therapy that aims to reduce criminal behaviour by identifying anger and aggressive behaviour and teaching alternatives to cope. For example learning meditation techniques.

Atavistic form: An approach to explain criminal behaviour, historically. This theory suggests criminal behaviour could be a result of genes, and therefore some individuals were predisposed to commit crimes. This theory further claimed to be able to identify criminals from the shape of their skulls, and that criminals were more primitive due to their inclination to commit crimes.

Cognitive distortions: Faulty cognitions that lead to irrational thoughts.

Custodial sentencing: A punishment that aims to reduce criminal behaviour, via sentencing in court for either prison or some other institute.

Differential association theory: A theory that suggests that criminal behaviour develops through experiences and association with other criminal behaviours.

Disorganised offender: This is a term used to describe offenders who are more likely to have committed the crime impulsively. This would be implied through a discarded body and various evidence left at the scene. These types of offenders are typically of low intelligence, not confident and have poor rates of employment.

Eysenck's theory (of criminal personality): This theory suggested that criminal behaviour was a result of certain personality traits, such as high extraversion and neuroticism.

Geographical profiling: An investigative method to identify an offender. By noting all the areas a certain crime took place, the location of the offender is predicted since an offender usually will not travel too far to commit crimes.

Hostile attribution bias: A form of cognitive distortion which may explain some criminal behaviour. Specifically, this is when a person interprets someone else's behaviour as hostile, in spite of it not being so. For example, misinterpreting a neutral face to be upset/angry.

Level of moral reasoning: A theory for criminal behaviour which suggests it arises due to an immature sense of what is right or wrong. According to this theory, moral reasoning develops in stages.

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Minimalisation: A form of cognitive distortion which may explain some criminal behaviour. This is when an offender reduces the severity of their crimes. For example using language like “they were asking for it” or avoiding using terms like “rape”.

Offender profiling: A technique used to identify possible offenders which involves creating a “profile” which contains probable traits of the offender. These traits are inferred from the way the crime was committed.

Organised offender: This refers to offenders who have planned the crime; which is implied through hiding the body and removing the weapon. These types of offenders are typically highly intelligent.

Recidivism: To re-offend.

Restorative justice programmes: Programmes that aim to reduce criminal behaviour by introducing the offender to the victim/victim’s family. This gives the victim the opportunity to reach catharsis and the criminal to confront the consequences of their actions.

Top-down approach: A technique used for offender profiling, which involves looking at previous similar cases and the criminals responsible. Thus, some common traits can be identified, which are probably exhibited by the current offender as well.

