

Eysenck's theory suggests that criminal behaviour occurs due to criminal personality traits caused by inherited genetics that affect the brain. (1) He suggested that Criminal Personality could be reduced to just three dimensions, which related to the underlying functioning of the individual's nervous system: extraversion (E), neuroticism (N) and psychoticism (P). (1)

People with high E scores are sociable, lively and sensation seeking; 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 and anti-social behaviour. (1) People with high N scores are anxious and react very strongly to aversive stimuli. High N occurs when the ANS becomes over-aroused and affects the limbic system, causing violent and unstable behaviour. (1) People who score high on P are aggressive and egocentric; Eysenck suggests that this is due to an excess of dopaminergic neurons, which causes an overproduction of dopamine and leads to less inhibitions and more aggressive behaviour.(1)

However, this theory has been largely criticized as it suggests that personality traits are stable and consistent across situations, yet people can show very different personality characteristics in relation to different types of crime. For example, a person who commits fraud will show very different scores on the neurotic, extroversion and psychoticism scales from a person who commits murder (1).

The theory merely identifies certain characteristics that may link to criminality; it does not inform us why individuals commit criminal acts. The theory tells us that rapists and child abusers are extrovert, neurotic and psychotic but it does not explain why they rape or abuse children (1).

Final mark is given for accuracy of written expression (SPAG)

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