

# An introduction to crime and criminology



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[DD105 Introduction to criminology](#)

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## Introduction

Welcome to this free course, *An introduction to crime and criminology*. This course will introduce you to the study of crime within the subject area of criminology by considering the relatively common-place problem of vandalism in the form of graffiti.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [\*\*DD105 \*Introduction to criminology\*\*\*](#).



# Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- provide a basic definition of 'crime'
- demonstrate that ideas about what a crime is and what it is not are often contested
- provide a definition of what criminology is and the subject matter it pertains to
- understand what criminologists 'do'
- develop and use criminological imagination to think about problems of crime and justice in new ways, going beyond everyday understandings.

# 1 Fear and fascination with crime and criminals

Have you thought about where your ideas about crime and 'the criminal' come from and what it is that has drawn you to being interested in this subject?

It is sometimes the case that people are drawn to study the problem of crime because of their fear of crime and so by studying it they might overcome those fears. Studying something to gain an understanding of it is one way people can conquer their fears. But, crime stories are also a source of fascination for some. Fascination may seem an unusual word to associate with the pressing social problem of crime, given its harmful and destructive consequences. Yet the already huge and continually growing volume of crime literature books is testimony to, and evidence of, some of this fascination. After all, being fascinated with something is often associated with being allured or charmed by it. How might such feelings be associated with those fearful things called crimes?

## Activity 1 Fictional and true crime stories in everyday life

 Allow about 10 minutes

Think about the role played by either fictional or non-fictional accounts of crimes and criminals in your everyday interactions and conversations. Can you think of any examples from TV or literature that illustrate a fascination with crime and criminals? Why do you think fictional or true crime stories hold such fascination for people? Jot down your answers in the text boxes below.

*Provide your answer...* **Examples from TV, literature or popular culture that illustrate our fascination with crime and criminals:**

*Provide your answer...* **Why you think fictional or true crime stories hold such fascination for people:**

## Discussion

Examination of TV and film schedules, and the offerings of online streaming services such as Netflix, NOW TV or Amazon Prime suggest that people thrive on a high-crime diet of murder tales, detective thrillers as well as 'true-life' documentaries.

Likewise the quickest browse through any physical or online bookshop reveals a vast array of fictional crime titles and authors, from Agatha Christie to Robert Galbraith to Jonathan Kellerman. In many bookshops you will also find a whole section dedicated to 'true crime' and books which claim to explore the 'mind of the criminal' or recount gruesome biographies of serial killers. If you google 'crime fiction books' or look these search terms up on Amazon, you will find hundreds, if not thousands of pages of titles.

You may have come up with other ways that fictional and non-fictional crime stories enter your consciousness or conversations on a day-to-day basis, but it is likely that you will have found it quite easy to find past and present manifestations of the culture of fascination with 'the crime problem' and with 'the criminal'.

It is important to recognise that individuals and societies construct narratives or stories about themselves and others because it is through stories that people can remember, make sense of and describe meaningful things in their lives.

It is also important to remember that there is always room for doubt and a single story can be told in an entirely different way when viewed from a different perspective.

## 1.1 Societies fearful of, yet fascinated by crime

Many societies across the globe are characterised by a culture of not only fear about crime but also of fascination. In popular culture – films, books and other forms of media – people hear stories about crime that suggest it is something to be feared and diminished: a society *frightened* of crime.

In other sets of stories that people hear and consume, crime is presented as macabre but glamorous, fearful but fascinating. It seems people cannot get enough of crime and these stories and in this instance it is a society *fascinated* by crime.



**Figure 1** Classic crime mystery books

Many people are seemingly both seduced and repulsed by stories of crimes and criminals. As the criminologist Jack Katz (2013, pp. 229) notes, 'Follow vandals and



amateur shoplifters as they duck into alleys ... and you will be moved by their delight in deviance ... Watch the strutting street display [of gang members] and you will be struck by the awesome fascination that symbols of evil hold ....' Why else are TV programmes that feature 'criminals caught in the act' or 'police in action' so popular?

Both fictionalised and true crime stories that are told through film, plays, books and television tend to represent crime in ways that criminologists sometimes refer to as a *common sense* view of crime. 'Common sense' understandings are often just personal opinions that take for granted that there is only one way to understand the problem. It is not that there is no grain of truth in such stories, or that they are simply 'wrong' and criminologists will come along with the 'right' point of view; however, these common-sense views often include details and facts that are all too real or appear to be real. It is important to remember there is also always room for doubt.

Some points to hold on to as you move to the next section of the course:

- Social scientists and criminologists aim to think about crime in a systematic way and seek to look beyond the 'common sense' view of crime.
- Individuals and societies construct stories (often referred to as 'narratives' in the social sciences) about themselves. These stories or narratives are a helpful means by which people describe and explain their lives. However, it is important to remember that there is always room for doubt and a single story can be told in an entirely different way when viewed from a different perspective.
- Society is fascinated and attracted by stories and representations of crimes and criminals, whilst at the same time fearful of them.

## 1.2 What is crime?

So, what is crime? For many people, most of the time, crime is something other people do. In the next activity, however, you'll check this against personal experience.

### Activity 2 Crimes and punishments

 Allow about 10 minutes

Look through the questions in the first column of Table 1 and make a mental note of the ones you would answer 'yes' to. Consider also the penalty you might have been given had you been caught, charged and convicted of these offences.

**Table 1 Crimes and punishments**

Incident	Offence	Penalty ranges
Have you ever bought goods knowing or believing they were stolen?	Handling stolen property	Discharge – 14 years' imprisonment
Have you ever taken stationery or anything else from your office/work?	Theft	Discharge – 7 years' imprisonment
Have you ever used your workplace's telephone for personal calls?	Dishonestly abstracting electricity	Fine of £2000 – 5 years' imprisonment

Have you ever kept money if you received too much change?	Theft	Discharge – 6 years' imprisonment
Have you kept money found in the street?	Theft	Discharge – 6 years' imprisonment
Have you taken 'souvenirs' from a pub or hotel?	Theft	Discharge – 6 years' imprisonment
Have you ever left a shop without paying in full for your purchases?	Making off without payment	Discharge – 2 years' imprisonment
Have you ever taken something from a shop or stall without paying for it (shoplifting)?	Theft	Discharge – 7 years' imprisonment
Have you used a television without buying a licence (pertains specifically to the UK)	Using a television without a licence	Fine of £1000, non-payment of the fine can lead to a custodial sentence in some cases
Have you ever fiddled your expenses?	Theft	Discharge – 6 years' custody
Have you ever been in possession of cannabis?	Misuse of drugs	Unlimited fine – up to 5 years' imprisonment or both

### Answer

How did you get on? It may be that you are a perfectly law-abiding citizen who has never knowingly committed a crime. But, if you have been involved in some of the above 'incidents', you may not have even registered them as being 'criminal.' It would also be likely, then, that you probably don't consider yourself to be a 'habitual criminal' or 'persistent offender'. Yet crime, often thought of as an abnormal, minority behaviour is actually something that is widespread, perhaps even a majority pursuit.

## 1.3 Defining crime

In the crimes and punishments listed in Table 1 you may have noticed that all of the offences carried fines or the possibility of imprisonment. This is because these are all activities that have been made illegal through the creation of laws (although you could argue that these aren't always enforced), in this case in the UK. That is, a crime is only a crime because it is defined as illegal by the criminal law.



**Figure 2** Criminal acts can lead to imprisonment

There are other ways to think about the question of what crime is and how it should be defined in society, however. For example, think about the following questions:

- Does the law cover all acts that are harmful to public welfare? For example, what about the problem of pollution levels in industrial areas?
- Does it include disastrous economic and social decisions taken by the government? For example, Iceland prosecuted several bankers as a result of the 2008 Global financial crisis, but few other countries did so.
- Is it always against the law to take another life? What about conduct in wartime, in military or policing service or assisting euthanasia?

### Activity 3 Is it a crime?

 Allow about 10 minutes

Answer true or false to the questions below.

(This list was abridged from one compiled by Assistant Professor of Law, at Nottingham University, Christopher Sargeant.)

1. No person shall, in the course of a business, import into England, potatoes which he knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, are from Poland.
  - ☐ True
  - ☐ False

#### Discussion

According to the Plant Health (England) Order 2015, art 19(6), it is illegal to bring any potatoes which are grown or suspected to have been grown in Poland into England unless written notification has been provided to an inspector at least two days prior to the intended date of their arrival. This law was introduced in 2004 to



respond to a series of serious ring rot outbreaks in Poland which were adversely affecting their potato crops.

2. It is illegal to be drunk in a pub.

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

### Discussion

According to the Licensing Act 1872, s12, 'every person found drunk ... on any licensed premises, shall be liable to a penalty.'

3. It is illegal to carry a plank along a pavement in the London Metropolitan Police District.

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

### Discussion

By virtue of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839, s54, it is an offence for any person to roll or carry any cask, tub, hoop, or wheel, or any ladder, plank, pole, showboard, or placard, upon any footway, except for the purpose of loading or unloading any cart or carriage, or of crossing the footway within the London Metropolitan Police District.

4. It is illegal to handle a fish in suspicious circumstances.

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

### Discussion

By virtue of the Salmon Act 1986, s32, it is illegal for a person to receive a fish, to undertake or assist in its retention, removal or disposal, or to arrange to do so, if he believes, or it would be reasonable for him to suspect, that an offence is being committed by taking, killing, landing, or selling that fish, either in England and Wales or in Scotland.

5. It is illegal to jump the queue in the London Underground ticket hall.

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

### Discussion

Under the Transport for London Railway Bye-Laws, Bye-Law 1, any person directed to queue by an authorised person or a sign must join the end of the queue and obey reasonable instructions by any authorised person regulating the queue within the Transport for London Network.

Were you surprised by some of the answers to the above questions? What is deemed to be a crime can change over time and in different legal jurisdictions,

## 2 Once a crime always a crime?

In the previous section it was stated that crimes can be thought of as acts which break the law and that this forms the legal definition of crime. At the same time though, some crimes are acts which can offend against a set of norms like moral codes or codes of expected public conduct. Only some norm violations are made into crimes, however. For example, graffiti is a crime when it appears without permission on public property. It is not a crime, however, if someone were to decorate the outside of their own home with graffiti-style images (although this may be contested by their neighbours, especially if it led to a decrease in property prices in the area!)



**Figure 3** Graffiti: is it a crime?

In this section, you will start to think about the circumstances under which the same activity might be seen by some people in society as something that should be a crime, but not by others. In this way, you will begin to see why it can be said that crime is a 'contested concept'.

### 2.1 Graffiti: crime or free expression?

Graffiti can take many different forms. It can include stencil art, freestyle artistic expression, and tag graffiti (a graffiti writer's personalised signature). It may be commissioned and legally painted, such as murals, or it may be sprayed illegally on public or private spaces (Vanderveen and van Eijk, 2016).

Some forms of graffiti are viewed as 'street art', which can be illegal or legal. Some commentators have specifically claimed that street art should be seen as 'a form of subcultural activity that is defined as unsanctioned visual art developed and/or practiced in public spaces' (Alpaslan, 2012, p. 53). By this definition, street art is characterised both by its illegal nature and artistic form (Hundertmark, 2003). It is thus differentiated from graffiti that is less easily defined as 'artistic', such as some forms of territorial graffiti (which is when different groups claim different urban spaces with tags or logos), vandalism or commissioned corporate street painting.

## Activity 4 What is graffiti?

 Allow about 20 minutes

Watch the video on graffiti below. As you watch, note down some of the points made and your own thoughts about whether graffiti is a crime or a form of free expression.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 1** Graffiti: art or vandalism?



What do you think? Should graffiti always be a crime? If not, under what conditions wouldn't it be?

### Discussion

Acts of graffiti or what is generally now referred to as graffiti have existed for thousands of years and appear to exist in virtually all modern cultures and countries. But the nature, scale or seriousness of graffiti is open to interpretation. There is no universally recognised way of recording or measuring graffiti and it is by no means certain that everybody considers graffiti harmful, or a crime. For example, the stencilled work 'Girl with a balloon' by the Bristol street artist Banksy, depicts a young girl watching her heart-shaped balloon float away. Originally, it appeared illegally on the side of a bridge, but by July 2017 it was voted the UK's best-loved piece of art (Kennedy, 2017).



Taking graffiti as an example, it becomes a little clearer that the question 'what is crime' is not easily defined. Graffiti is a social activity that attracts widely differing public opinions on how it should be understood or responded to and whether it should be controlled and punished or embraced and celebrated.

The next activity asks you to try and answer some questions about graffiti to get you thinking about the different ways it can be interpreted.

### Activity 5 Graffiti quiz

 Allow about 5 minutes

Try the following quiz on understanding graffiti. You won't necessarily know the answers from having watched the previous film or reading the previous pages. But have a go and then read it over after you've found all the correct answers.

1. Graffiti can be seen as:
  - ☐ art
  - ☐ social protest
  - ☐ vandalism (crime)
  - ☐ all of the above
2. When viewed as social protest, graffiti can be thought of as a form of:
  - ☐ political resistance
  - ☐ music
  - ☐ justice
  - ☐ public narrative
3. Graffiti can sometimes be understood as:
  - ☐ a means by which people signal that they are happy with the way society is organised.
  - ☐ a means by which people try to speak out to say that not everyone is in agreement with the status quo.
  - ☐ a form of collective action.
  - ☐ none of the above.
4. Why might it be said that graffiti is a contested issue in society?
  - ☐ It often includes messages of resistance or social protest.
  - ☐ The public holds different views on graffiti, some see it as art, other see it as crime.
  - ☐ It is an illegal activity.
  - ☐ The reasons people engage in graffiti are not well understood.
5. Why is graffiti viewed as a problem? (Select two)
  - ☐ It can be viewed as a threat to private property.
  - ☐ It is highly visible and public.
  - ☐ It often includes poor grammar.

Thinking about the different ways graffiti can be thought about and understood opens up questions about what is and isn't defined as a crime and how public opinion can differ on what should or shouldn't be deemed illegal. You will consider this more next.

## 2.2 Questioning what is a crime and what is not

Public opinion on how people should behave and act towards one another – both in society generally, and across different social situations – often varies considerably. How people think about graffiti is one example. But think also, for example, about young people meeting up after school outside a local shop. The young people might see the space as a convenient spot to chat with their friends before going home. But the shopkeeper or local residents might see the young people as disruptive or be suspicious of them. Elderly people or other young people might feel intimidated walking through the group, especially if they are being loud or play-fighting, because it may feel unpredictable or even threatening. In such a social situation, nothing is really 'wrong', no illegal, criminal or harmful activity is taking place. However, it identifies a social situation in which public opinion differs widely about what 'appropriate conduct' might be.



**Figure 4** How are crimes and criminals defined?

In summary, there are many things that happen in society that are harmful, which are not legally defined as crimes in the criminal law. Likewise, there are some things that are

defined as crime, which many people don't really view as 'criminal'. Crime is therefore a contested concept.

Indeed, the different ways of thinking about crime and other harmful acts have always varied historically, across societies, and amongst different social groups. Many legally-defined crimes are considered to be legitimate acts in other contexts. Trying to get to the bottom of how and why certain activities are defined as crime while others are not is one of the tasks that criminologists undertake.

The next section introduces the field of criminology and what kinds of things criminologists study.

### 3 What is criminology?

In this section, you will begin to consider what criminology is and what criminologists 'do'. One of the aspects of criminology that this course focuses on is the importance of learning to question ideas about crime. In particular, you are being invited to question things that might be taken for granted in relation to crime, the law, criminal justice, and what dangers people in society find most threatening (Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973).



**Figure 5** Policing and the right to protest

Taking an open and questioning perspective when seeking to understand crime and justice allows you to consider a wider range of influences that shape ideas about crime, the problem of crime itself and the way societies respond to it, including, for example, the influence of historical, political and economic factors (Young, 2011).

It is important to note that criminology often focuses on trying to understand the social, economic or environmental factors associated with crime and criminal justice, rather than just the individuals involved.

First have a go at Activity 6 to test your current understanding of criminology.

#### Activity 6 Defining criminology

 Allow about 5 minutes

Complete the following activity selecting the correct option from each drop down box.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

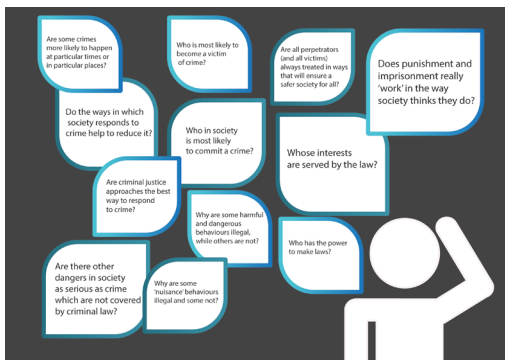


The field of criminology, therefore, draws on a range of social sciences which help to shape the kinds of questions that criminologists pose and seek to answer, as the next section will explore.

### 3.1 What kinds of questions do criminologists seek to answer?

Whatever your background or circumstances, a useful starting point for beginning to think like a criminologist is to consider how and when a harmful action is defined as a 'crime' by society, or in criminal law, and when it is not. This is perhaps more complicated than it first appears because, as previous sections of this course have outlined, even though some wrong-doing is illegal, other harmful or dangerous acts are not (Hillyard et al., 2004).

As you begin to delve further into the study of criminology, it will become clearer that what a society defines as 'crime' always needs careful scrutiny and questioning. What the criminal law narrowly focuses on does not always cover the most dangerous harms in society, and some actions deemed to be criminal change over time and place. Likewise, the way the criminal justice system operates is also an area that some criminologists study and scrutinise. Some of the broad questions criminologists or those studying criminology might ask are shown in Figure 6.



**Figure 6** Asking criminological questions

Whilst these are some of the questions that criminologists start from, the work that criminologists actually do on a day-to-day basis can vary a lot. The next section explores a few examples of the kinds of work some criminologists undertake.

### 3.2 What do criminologists do?

In Video 2, OU criminologist, Professor Steve Tombs, talks about the Grenfell Tower fire which happened in Kensington London on 14 June 2017.



View at: [youtube:gk0H7Yhzzrk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk0H7Yhzzrk)



**Video 2** Grenfell: the avoidable tragedy

Tombs is an internationally recognised expert in the field of health and safety. At first, the issues of 'health and safety' might not strike you as being relevant to criminology. However, researchers in criminology explore a wide range of different subject areas associated with not just conventional crime and criminal justice, but also 'social harm' and different forms of justice.

Some of the topic areas criminologists concern themselves with, which you might not have thought about, include:

- eco-crime or what is known as 'green criminology'
- human trafficking
- deaths in custody
- prison studies and prison abolitionism
- immigration detention
- social housing and homelessness
- expressions of crime and 'the criminal' in popular culture.

In the next section you will explore some of the areas in which some of the criminologists who work at The Open University specialise in.

### 3.3 Criminology at The Open University

For a brief overview of what a handful of criminologists do, click on the link below. It provides examples of the work of criminologists at The Open University and outlines the areas in which they do some of their work.

It is also worth noting that criminologists often work with charities or non-governmental organisations or sometimes with companies or with government, providing expert, evidence-based advice or undertaking research.

[Link: Criminology at The Open University](#)

### 3.4 Being open to multiple perspectives on problems of crime

Earlier in the course it was pointed out that individuals and societies construct narratives about themselves and that narratives are a helpful means by which people describe and explain their lives. It was pointed out, however, that there is always room for doubt and a single story can be told in an entirely different way when viewed from a different perspective.

Crime, justice, victimisation and the study of criminology can all be emotive areas of study. As a result, criminologists need to exercise some caution in thinking about their work and what is motivating them to do it.

Everyone has opinions and value judgements that they make on the basis of 'gut reaction' or because of previous life experiences that influence the way they see things. Everyone has a different and unique perspective that is valuable. But, when, as social scientists or



as criminologists, you think that your vantage point on the world is the only 'right' way of seeing things, it can cloud your capacity to genuinely listen to the perspectives of others or to see the world from a different vantage point.

It is not a problem for the social scientist or criminologist to feel passionate about their subject matter and, in fact, it can be of great benefit. However, what is most important is that you have a clear understanding of yourself, what your value judgements are and where your biases might be.

### Activity 7 Self-reflection: what motivates you to study criminology?

 Allow about 15 minutes

Take some time to think about what has drawn you to the study of criminology, then answer the following questions in the text boxes provided.

1. Why am I interested in criminology?

Provide your answer...

2. What are the topics that drew me to this field of study and why?

Provide your answer...

3. Do I have strong pre-existing opinions on the problem of crime and the delivery of justice? If so, what are they?

Provide your answer...

4. What evidence do I have for my opinions?

Provide your answer...

5. How will I respond if my opinions are challenged by evidence that contradicts them?

Provide your answer...

### Discussion

Many different factors might influence a person's interest in a particular field of study. One important factor to consider is whether or not you have a bias towards an issue or topic. If you are moved to study a topic because of anger or because you already have a strong opinion on it, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't study it. Passion is a good thing! It will keep you interested in your chosen field for a long time to come. However, you do need to be aware of the value judgements that you are bringing into your study.

The social sciences and criminology often make reference to the idea of trying to be 'value-free' in research and study endeavours. Often this is an impossible ideal, but

it can still be worth bearing it in mind. Before starting any course of study it is important to begin to develop your self-reflective skills by really questioning yourself on why you are interested in it and reflecting on whether or not you have any biases.

Hopefully this activity got you thinking quite openly about what attracted you to thinking about studying criminology and what has shaped your opinions about crime. In the next section you will begin to take this a bit further by exploring what can be called your 'criminological imagination'.

## 4 What is the criminological imagination?

The term 'criminological imagination' was inspired by the work of the famous American sociologist Charles Wright Mills and his influential book *The Sociological Imagination*. First published in 1959, it has never been out of print.



**Figure 7** Author of *The Sociological Imagination*, Charles Wright Mills

Mills summarises the sociological imagination (which is relevant for the development of the criminological imagination) as 'connecting private troubles with public issues'. In this context, a 'trouble' is a private matter that emerges from the personal experiences of the individual and affects their immediate relationships and social world. An 'issue', on the other hand, is a public matter, which should be understood through an analysis of the political and economic structures of a given society.

It might be said that everyone has a kind of 'criminological imagination'. That is, whenever a crime story or other shocking or harmful event is featured in the news, people often immediately begin to imagine the circumstances that may have led to the event, how the victims and their families may feel, or what should be done in response to what has happened.

In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), Mills states that the sociological imagination includes 'a quality of mind' that offers 'an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities' (p. 15). 'The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society' (p. 6). This means situating an individual (biography) within both their own past and also of the society in which they live (history).

Mills discusses the sociological imagination as a way to take account of the issues faced by individuals. He sets this not only in the context of their daily experiences and social positions, but also within a society that has social divisions and inequalities.

Mills (1959) coined the phrase 'the sociological imagination' because he was a sociologist and needed an over-arching term that indicated he was exploring ideas from other sociologists. However, he is clear that the term the 'sociological imagination' matters 'less than the idea' (p. 19) itself. Mills notes that political theorists call the idea the 'political imagination' and anthropologists (those who study small-scale human societies) the 'anthropological imagination'. It comes as no surprise, then, that when criminologists talk of this idea, they call it the 'criminological imagination'.

The next section invites you to begin to explore your own criminological imagination.

## 4.1 Exploring your criminological imagination

Criminology can be an emotive subject to study (de Haan and Loader, 2002; Karstedt et al., 2011; Drake & Harvey, 2014). Crime, harm and victimisation are all issues that can draw out painful or angry responses, and sometimes these responses are amplified through the media and the stories that you hear about crime. These passions will help to stimulate your criminological imagination, but they can also, sometimes, get in the way of careful, rational analysis.

The trick for the criminologist is learning how to embrace these passions enough to fire your interest and imagination, but not to allow them to prevent you from engaging with the rigours of careful social science thinking and inquiry.

### Activity 8 Using the criminological imagination to explore graffiti as a form of resistance

 Allow about 5 minutes

One of the keys to using your criminological imagination is recognising that you are searching for a link between individual actions or reactions and wider social structures, events or influences.

Recall that C. Wright Mills' way of describing the sociological imagination was the drive to 'connect private troubles with public issues'. The same is true for the criminological imagination.

If you return to the example of graffiti that you learnt about earlier and think about the times when it is being used as a form of social protest, what might an act of graffiti tell you about 'public issues' when it is seen as an individual act of resistance (i.e. a 'private trouble')?

To think about the ways that wider social structures can influence and shape individual actions, including acts of resistance or social protest, complete the following activity by selecting the correct option from the drop down boxes.

Interactive content is not available in this format.





## 5 Crime and criminology quiz

To check your understanding of crime and criminology complete this short quiz.

### Activity 9 Checking your understanding



*Allow about 5 minutes*

1. What is crime? (Select more than one)
  - ☐ Acts which break the law.
  - ☐ All actions or behaviours that are harmful to other people or society.
  - ☐ A contested concept.
2. Are all things that are harmful in society also against the law? (Select one)
  - ☐ Yes, the law protects everyone equally.
  - ☐ Only some normal and moral violations are made into crimes.
  - ☐ It depends on how you define harm/harmful.
  - ☐ No, only those which are really serious.
3. Are all forms of graffiti crimes? (Select one)
  - ☐ Yes, all graffiti is a crime.
  - ☐ No, only non-artistic graffiti is a crime.
  - ☐ Most forms of non-commissioned graffiti are criminal acts.
  - ☐ No, only graffiti created by teenagers is a crime.
4. What is criminology? (Select more than one)
  - ☐ It is a social science.
  - ☐ It is a field of systematic study of the problems of crime and criminal justice.
  - ☐ A popular subject of study for university students.
5. Crime, justice victimisation and the study of criminology can all be emotive areas of study. As a result, the criminologist needs to: (Select one)
  - ☐ Be aware of the biases, value judgements and opinions that they bring with them into their field of study.
  - ☐ Be able to suppress their emotional reactions.
  - ☐ Be trained in deep meditation.
  - ☐ None of the above.
6. Using your criminological imagination involves trying to think about criminological problems by: (Select one)
  - ☐ Asking how an individual person can harm another
  - ☐ Considering how private troubles connect with public issues.
  - ☐ Exploring the way a serial killer thinks.
  - ☐ Lying in a field thinking criminological thoughts.

## Conclusion

Crime evokes a wide variety of reactions in people: fear, anger, fascination, curiosity. In this free course, *An introduction to crime and criminology*, you have considered the relatively common-place problem of vandalism in the form of graffiti as one example through which to explore your own views about an everyday sort of crime.

You were also invited to consider how social scientists and criminologists, in particular, study and seek to understand problems of crime. Finally, you were introduced to the idea of the criminological imagination. This, in part, involved viewing criminological issues or problems from multiple perspectives but also suggested that private troubles and social issues are often linked together.

In summary, you have learned that:

- crimes are acts which break the law of the land
- graffiti is a crime that is not always seen as one
- in different circumstances, graffiti can be viewed as a crime, as art, as a form of freedom of expression, or as social protest.
- crime is a contested concept and graffiti is an example of this
- criminology is a social science, which means it involves the systematic study of human society and social relationships as they relate to problems of crime and criminal justice
- crime, justice, victimisation and the study of criminology can all be emotive areas of study. As a result, the criminologist needs to be aware of the biases, value judgements and opinions that they bring with them into their field of study
- using your criminological imagination involves trying to think about criminological problems by considering how 'private troubles connect with public issues.'

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course

**DD105** [Introduction to criminology](#).

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## Further reading

- Alpaslan, Z. (2012) 'Is street art a crime? An attempt at examining street art using criminology', *Advances in Applied Sociology*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 53–8.
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