

**DD105\_1**

**An introduction to crime and 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***](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/modules/dd105).

## 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?

Start of Activity

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

Allow about 10 minutes

Start of Question

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.

End of Question

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

Start of Question

End of Question

***Why you think fictional or true crime stories hold such fascination for people:***

[View discussion - Part](" \l "Session1_Discussion1)

End of Activity

## 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.

Start of Figure



**Figure 1** Classic crime mystery books

[View description - Figure 1 Classic crime mystery books](" \l "Session1_Description1)

End of Figure

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.

Start of Activity

**Activity 2 Crimes and punishments**

Allow about 10 minutes

Start of Question

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.

Start of Table

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 |

End of Table

End of Question

[View answer - Activity 2 Crimes and punishments](" \l "Session1_Answer1)

End of Activity

## 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.

Start of Figure



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

[View description - Figure 2 Criminal acts can lead to imprisonment](" \l "Session1_Description2)

End of Figure

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?

Start of Activity

**Activity 3 Is it a crime?**

Allow about 10 minutes

Start of Question

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.)

End of Question

Start of Question

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.

End of Question

True

False

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session1_Interaction3)

[View discussion - Part](" \l "Session1_Discussion2)

Start of Question

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

End of Question

True

False

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session1_Interaction4)

[View discussion - Part](" \l "Session1_Discussion3)

Start of Question

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

End of Question

True

False

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session1_Interaction5)

[View discussion - Part](" \l "Session1_Discussion4)

Start of Question

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

End of Question

True

False

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session1_Interaction6)

[View discussion - Part](" \l "Session1_Discussion5)

Start of Question

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

End of Question

True

False

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session1_Interaction7)

[View discussion - Part](" \l "Session1_Discussion6)

End of Activity

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!)

Start of Figure



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

[View description - Figure 3 Graffiti: is it a crime?](" \l "Session2_Description1)

End of Figure

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.

Start of Activity

**Activity 4 What is graffiti?**

Allow about 20 minutes

Start of Question

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.

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

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

[View transcript - Video 1 Graffiti: art or vandalism?](" \l "Session2_Transcript1)

Start of Figure



End of Figure

End of Media Content

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

End of Question

[View discussion - Activity 4 What is graffiti?](" \l "Session2_Discussion1)

End of Activity

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.

Start of Activity

**Activity 5 Graffiti quiz**

Allow about 5 minutes

Start of Question

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:

End of Question

art

social protest

vandalism (crime)

all of the above

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session2_Interaction1)

Start of Question

1. When viewed as social protest, graffiti can be thought of as a form of:

End of Question

political resistance

music

justice

public narrative

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session2_Interaction2)

Start of Question

1. Graffiti can sometimes be understood as:

End of Question

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.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session2_Interaction3)

Start of Question

1. Why might it be said that graffiti is a contested issue in society?

End of Question

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.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session2_Interaction4)

Start of Question

1. Why is graffiti viewed as a problem? (Select two)

End of Question

It can be viewed as a threat to private property.

It is highly visible and public.

It often includes poor grammar.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session2_Interaction5)

End of Activity

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.

Start of Figure



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

[View description - Figure 4 How are crimes and criminals defined?](" \l "Session2_Description2)

End of Figure

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).

Start of Figure



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

[View description - Figure 5 Policing and the right to protest](" \l "Session3_Description1)

End of Figure

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.

Start of Activity

**Activity 6 Defining criminology**

Allow about 5 minutes

Start of Question

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

Start of Media Content

Interactive content is not available in this format.

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

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.

Start of Figure



**Figure 6** Asking criminological questions

[View description - Figure 6 Asking criminological questions](" \l "Session3_Description2)

End of Figure

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.

Start of Media Content

Watch the video at [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk0H7Yhzzrk&hl=en&fs=1&rel=0).

**Video 2** Grenfell: the avoidable tragedy

End of Media Content

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](http://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/olinkremote.php?website=DD105_1&targetdoc=Criminology%20Powerpoint)

## 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.

Start of Activity

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

Allow about 15 minutes

Start of Question

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.

End of Question

Start of Question

1. Why am I interested in criminology?

End of Question

*Provide your answer...*

Start of Question

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

End of Question

*Provide your answer...*

Start of Question

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

End of Question

*Provide your answer...*

Start of Question

1. What evidence do I have for my opinions?

End of Question

*Provide your answer...*

Start of Question

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

End of Question

*Provide your answer...*

[View discussion - Part](" \l "Session3_Discussion1)

End of Activity

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.

Start of Figure



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

End of Figure

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.

Start of Activity

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

Allow about 5 minutes

Start of Question

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.

Start of Media Content

Interactive content is not available in this format.

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

## 5 Crime and criminology quiz

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

Start of Activity

**Activity 9 Checking your understanding**

Allow about 5 minutes

Start of Question

1. What is crime? (Select more than one)

End of Question

Acts which break the law.

All actions or behaviours that are harmful to other people or society.

A contested concept.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session5_Interaction1)

Start of Question

1. Are all things that are harmful in society also against the law? (Select one)

End of Question

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.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session5_Interaction2)

Start of Question

1. Are all forms of graffiti crimes? (Select one)

End of Question

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.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session5_Interaction3)

Start of Question

1. What is criminology? (Select more than one)

End of Question

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.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session5_Interaction4)

Start of Question

1. Crime, justice victimisation and the study of criminology can all be emotive areas of study. As a result, the criminologist needs to: (Select one)

End of Question

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.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session5_Interaction5)

Start of Question

1. Using your criminological imagination involves trying to think about criminological problems by: (Select one)

End of Question

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.

[View answer - Part](" \l "Session5_Interaction6)

End of Activity

## 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](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/modules/dd105).

Start of Box

**A level Sociology with the NEC**

Start of Figure



End of Figure

From race and gender identity, to criminal behaviour, inequality, religion and family conflict – sociology will open up your understanding of human behaviour and interaction. It also seeks to improve the society in which we live.

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End of Box

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## Further reading

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## Acknowledgements

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**Videos**

Video 1: 'Graffiti:Art or Vandalism?' from the ellicet YouTube channel https://youtu.be/t5zQVRuGXBM, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en\_GB

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## Solutions

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

### Part

#### 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.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session1_Part2)

## Activity 2 Crimes and punishments

#### 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.

[Back to - Activity 2 Crimes and punishments](" \l "Session1_Activity2)

## Activity 3 Is it a crime?

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

True

**Wrong:**

False

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session1_Part4)

#### 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.

[Back to - Part](#Session1_Part4)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

True

**Wrong:**

False

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session1_Part5)

#### Discussion

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

[Back to - Part](#Session1_Part5)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

True

**Wrong:**

False

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session1_Part6)

#### 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.

[Back to - Part](#Session1_Part6)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

True

**Wrong:**

False

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session1_Part7)

#### 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.

[Back to - Part](#Session1_Part7)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

True

**Wrong:**

False

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session1_Part8)

#### 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.

[Back to - Part](#Session1_Part8)

## Activity 4 What is graffiti?

#### 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).

[Back to - Activity 4 What is graffiti?](" \l "Session2_Activity1)

## Activity 5 Graffiti quiz

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

all of the above

**Wrong:**

art

social protest

vandalism (crime)

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session2_Part1)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

political resistance

**Wrong:**

music

justice

public narrative

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session2_Part2)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

a means by which people try to speak out to say that not everyone is in agreement with the status quo.

**Wrong:**

a means by which people signal that they are happy with the way society is organised.

a form of collective action.

none of the above.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session2_Part3)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

The public holds different views on graffiti, some see it as art, other see it as crime.

**Wrong:**

It often includes messages of resistance or social protest.

It is an illegal activity.

The reasons people engage in graffiti are not well understood.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session2_Part4)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

It can be viewed as a threat to private property.

It is highly visible and public.

**Wrong:**

It often includes poor grammar.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session2_Part5)

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

### Part

#### 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.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session3_Part6)

## Activity 9 Checking your understanding

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

Acts which break the law.

A contested concept.

**Wrong:**

All actions or behaviours that are harmful to other people or society.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session5_Part1)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

Only some normal and moral violations are made into crimes.

**Wrong:**

Yes, the law protects everyone equally.

It depends on how you define harm/harmful.

No, only those which are really serious.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session5_Part2)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

Most forms of non-commissioned graffiti are criminal acts.

**Wrong:**

Yes, all graffiti is a crime.

No, only non-artistic graffiti is a crime.

No, only graffiti created by teenagers is a crime.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session5_Part3)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

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.

**Wrong:**

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session5_Part4)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

Be aware of the biases, value judgements and opinions that they bring with them into their field of study.

**Wrong:**

Be able to suppress their emotional reactions.

Be trained in deep meditation.

None of the above.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session5_Part5)

### Part

#### Answer

**Right:**

Considering how private troubles connect with public issues.

**Wrong:**

Asking how an individual person can harm another

Exploring the way a serial killer thinks.

Lying in a field thinking criminological thoughts.

[Back to - Part](" \l "Session5_Part6)

# Figure 1 Classic crime mystery books

## Description

Image of six crime novels from Penguin books laid out in a display. There is also a magnifying glass and a gun lying on top of a couple of the books. The books are: Appointment with death, Agatha Christie; No footprints in the bush, Arthur W. Upfield; Peril at End House, Agatha Christie; Murder on the Orient Express, Agatha Christie; The murder at the vicarage, Agatha Christie; Miss Marple and the thirteen problems, Agatha Christie

[Back to - Figure 1 Classic crime mystery books](" \l "Session1_Figure1)

# Figure 2 Criminal acts can lead to imprisonment

## Description

An image of a prisoner gripping the bars from inside a dark cell. You can only see the prisoners hands and forearms.

[Back to - Figure 2 Criminal acts can lead to imprisonment](" \l "Session1_Figure2)

# Figure 3 Graffiti: is it a crime?

## Description

Image of a graffiti artist drawing graffiti on a wall. The person is crouched down as they paint and you are unable to see their face as the photo cuts off.

[Back to - Figure 3 Graffiti: is it a crime?](" \l "Session2_Figure1)

# Figure 4 How are crimes and criminals defined?

## Description

Two hooded youths standing at the entrance of an underpass.

[Back to - Figure 4 How are crimes and criminals defined?](" \l "Session2_Figure3)

# Figure 5 Policing and the right to protest

## Description

A line of uniformed police officers standing on a street in London during a protest. Three protestors have approached them.

[Back to - Figure 5 Policing and the right to protest](" \l "Session3_Figure1)

# Figure 6 Asking criminological questions

## Description

Graphic showing some of the broad questions criminologists might ask.

The questions are:

* Are some crimes more likely to happen at particular times or in particular places?
* Do the ways in which society responds to crime help to reduce it?
* Who is most likely to become a victim of crime?
* Who in society is most likely to commit a crime?
* Are criminal justice approaches the best way to respond to crime?
* Are there other dangers in society as serious as crime which are not covered by criminal law?
* Why are some ‘nuisance’ behaviours illegal and some not?
* Why are some harmful and dangerous behaviours illegal, while others are not?
* Are all perpetrators (and all victims) always treated in ways that will ensure a safer society for all?
* Whose interests are served by the law?
* Who has the power to make laws?
* Does punishment and imprisonment really ‘work’ in the way society thinks they do?

[Back to - Figure 6 Asking criminological questions](" \l "Session3_Figure2)

# Video 1 Graffiti: art or vandalism?

## Transcript

[MUSIC PLAYING]

WOMAN:

It is vandalism. It is an appropriation of the public space or somebody's private property without permission and nobody has a right to do that.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

WOMAN:

It's only graffiti or vandalism if you get arrested, but if you get away with it then it's clearly art.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

MAN:

I think graffiti artists tried so hard to be like, it's not art. It's not art. It's graffiti, and they want to be so special. And fine art wants so much to not let graffiti be art, because then all of a sudden you have this credible art that is done fast and better than a lot of crappy art that's made fast and sold for a lot of money. And a lot of graffiti artists are doing way better stuff quicker and not selling for a lot of money. So I think it all becomes-- everyone knows what I'm talking about.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

WOMAN:

When was the last time we've ever seen an important movement be contributed by teenagers?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

MAN [NON ENGLISH SPEECH]:

Graffiti it's not limited to only one thing. It's a lot broader, a lot more democratic let's say and even so, people still manage to criticise it. Art is different. If you label something as art, people understand it better and end up accepting your ideas because it's art. MAN: It is art, but the difference is permission.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

BETHANY:

I mean living in this neighbourhood, we expect to see sort of art popping up all over the place. And it brings me joy when I see the colourful art.

NICHOLAS:

I think it enhances the way that the neighbourhood looks. I think that it makes it interesting, it makes it unique.

MAN:

I was told at a young age that this art form would not get you nowhere, but guess what? I travel. I do shows. I'm still painting.

BETHANY:

I understand that it's vandalism, but it's pretty vandalism.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

PATO [NON ENGLISH SPEECH]:

I don't understand this label, Fine Art. Art Fine? I don't know. I don't understand it. I just don't understand it.

MAN:

There's good graffiti and there's bad graffiti. Some graffiti is art. But when it's just that kind of typical fat letters saying, you know, not very thoughtful things, it just becomes graffiti.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NOVI [NON ENGLISH SPEECH]:

It has it's own way to be done, but it's not aggressive, it's delicate. It has more emotions to it than adrenaline. Worldwide graffiti is all about this; it's adrenaline; it's bombing, let's paint everything, two minutes, steel doors, the owners are coming, trains, this whole adrenaline rush. But fine art is the graffiti that holds more emotion, more time and more dedication.

MAN:

Graffiti is way, way at the bottom. You got all the other arts through time, and then we're talking graffiti, which most people might get confused and think it's childish or children do it. You know, it's not the case. I think in time and hopefully in my lifetime, graffiti may be considered in that light.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[Back to - Video 1 Graffiti: art or vandalism?](" \l "Session2_MediaContent1)