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| **Psychodynamic Explanations of Offending AO1** | **Psychodynamic Explanations of Offending AO3** |
| **The inadequate superego**The superego is formed at the end of the phallic stage of development when children resolve the Oedipus complex (or Electra complex for girls). The superego works on the morality principle and exerts its influence by punishing the ego through guilt for wrongdoing, whilst rewarding it with pride for moral behaviour.Blackburn (1993) argued that if the superego is somehow deficient or inadequate then criminal behaviour is inevitable because the id is given ‘free rein’ and not properly controlled. 3 types of inadequate superego have been proposed:* *The weak superego* – if the same-sex parent is absent during the phallic stage, the child cannot internalise a fully-formed superego as there is no opportunity for identification. This would make immoral or criminal behaviour more likely.
* *The deviant superego* – if the superego that the child internalises has immoral or deviant values this would lead to offending behaviour. E.g. a boy that is raised by a criminal father is not likely to associate guilt with wrongdoing
* *The over-harsh superego* – a healthy superego is like a kind but firm internal parent: it has rules but is also forgiving of transgressions. In contrast, an excessively punitive or overly harsh superego means the individual is crippled by guilt and anxiety. This may (unconsciously) drive the individual to perform criminal acts in order to satisfy the superego’s overwhelming need for punishment.
 | **Gender Bias**P: One issue with Freudian theory as one of the psychodynamic explanations of criminal behaviour is that it is gender bias.E: For example it suggests that girls develop a weaker superego than boys. Having not experienced castration anxiety, girls are under less pressure to identify with their mothers (than boys are with their fathers) so their superego (and therefore their sense of morality) is less fully realised. The implication of this is therefore that females should be more prone to criminal behaviour than males.E: this is an issue because this Freudian suggestion is not supported by research, with the biggest contradiction coming from statistics regarding the male-female ratio of inmates in prison. Hoffman (1975) conducted a study where children were required to resist temptation, and found hardly any evidence of gender differences, and when there was it was the little girls that tended to be more moral than the boys.L: As a result, the credibility of the Freudian theory as one psychodynamic explanation of criminal behaviour is reduced. |
| **Lack of evidence**P: One issue with Freudian theory as one of the psychodynamic explanations of criminal behaviour is that there is very little supportive evidence for this theory.E: For example, there is very little evidence that suggests that children raised without a same-sex parent are less law-abiding as adults (or fail to develop a conscience). E: this is an issue because it contradicts Blackburn’s weak superego argument. Furthermore, the theory fails to consider the potential influence of genetics or socialisation, rather than the formation of a deviant superego, suggesting it is also reductionist. Finally, the idea that criminal behaviour reflects an unconscious desire for punishment seems implausible. Most offenders go to great lengths to conceal their crimes which suggests they want to avoid punishment at all costs.L: as a result, the explanatory power of the Freudian theory as one psychodynamic explanation of criminal behaviour is further reduced. |
| **The maternal deprivation theory**Bowlby (1944) argued that the ability to form meaningful relationships in adulthood was dependent on the child forming a warm, continuous relationship with a mother-figure. The maternal bond was seen by Bowlby as unique and superior to any other bond. Failure to establish this bond in the first few years if life would mean the child will experiences consequences later on. One of these consequences would be forming the affectionless psychopathy personality type. It is characterised by a lack of guilt, empathy and feelings for others. Maternally deprived individuals are likely to engage in acts of delinquency and cannot develop close relationships with others, as they lack the experience to do so.Bowlby interviewed 44 juvenile thieves and their families and found that 14 of the sample showed personality and behavioural characteristics that could be classified as ‘affectionless psychopathy’. Of this 14, 12 had experienced prolonged separation from their mothers during infancy (in particular, the first 2 yrs of life). In a non-criminal group, only two had experienced similar separation. Bowlby concluded that the effects of maternal deprivation had caused affectionless and delinquent behaviour among the juvenile thieves. (NB: this study can be used as supportive evidence for the maternal deprivation theory!). | **Abstract nature**P: One further issue with psychodynamic explanations of criminal behaviour as a whole is that they are too abstract in nature, and therefore are too subjective.E: For example, psychodynamic explanations in general suffer from a lack of falsifiability. The many unconscious concepts within Freudian theory mean that applications to crime are not open to empirical testing.E: This is an issue because without supportive evidence, arguments such as the inadequate superego can only be judged on their face value rather than their scientific worth. For this reason, psychodynamic explanations are regarded as pseudoscientific (‘fake’ science) and may contribute little to our understanding of crime, or how to prevent it.L: Consequently, the overall credibility of the psychodynamic explanations of criminal behaviour is questioned. |
| **Methodological Issues**P: One issue with psychodynamic explanations of criminal behaviour is that research into this theory has been questioned on methodological grounds.E: For example, Bowlby’s 44 thieves study (1944) was subject to researcher bias because it is suggested that his preconceptions of what he expected to find may have influenced the response of his interviewees (i.e. the link between maternal deprivation and affectionless psychopathy).E: This is an issue because if research is subject to researcher bias, the validity of the research overall is reduced. Furthermore, Bowlby also failed to draw a distinction between deprivation and privation within his research. Many of the thieves he studied had experienced privation, which many commenters consider to be more damaging than deprivation.L: as a result, the overall internal validity of Bowlby’s research is in doubt, and therefore as a result casts further doubt over the psychodynamic explanations of criminal behaviour overall. |