

# Imagine this...

A psychologist is asked to investigate the thought patterns and attitudes of criminals compared to non-criminals.

How might this be tested?

What measures would they use?

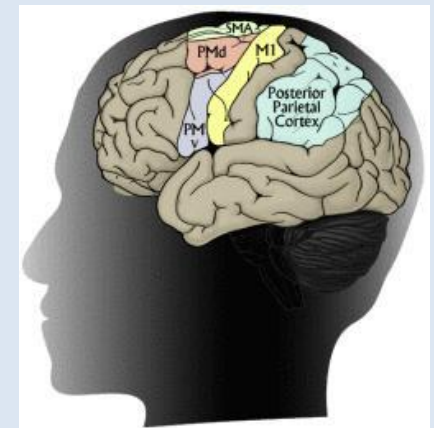
What kind of data would they collect?

What would be their research design?

Any strengths or limitations?

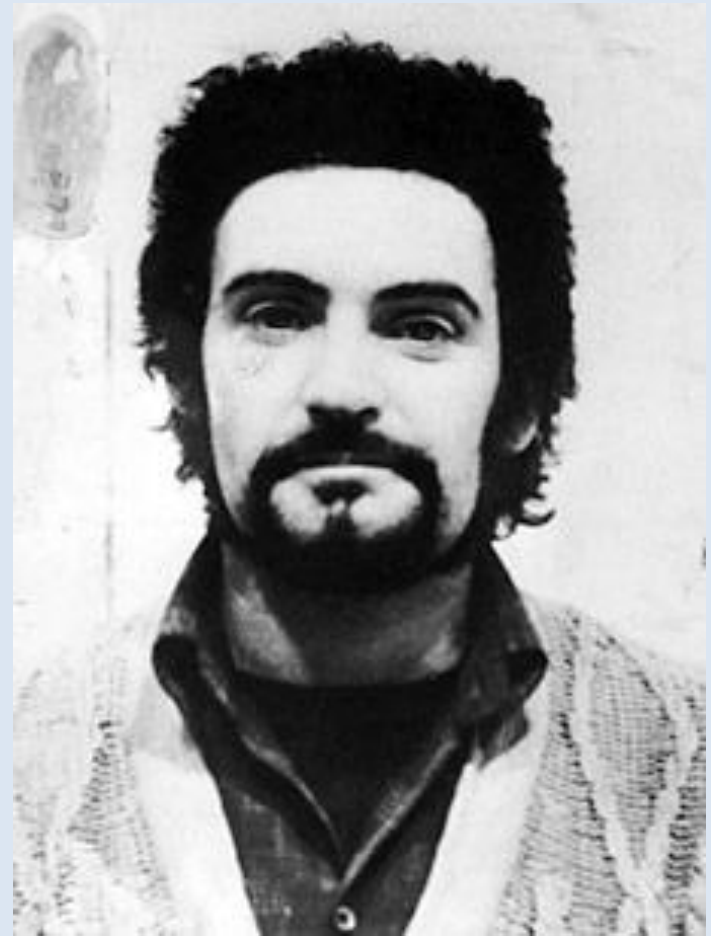
# Turning to Crime: Cognition

- What differences in cognition might we expect between criminals and non-criminal
- Areas to study:
  - **Criminal Thinking Patterns**
  - **Moral Development & Crime**
  - **Social Cognition**



# Cognition: Are criminals always responsible for their actions?

- **McNaghten Rules.**  
Rules used by courts to decide whether to uphold a plea of diminished responsibility
- **Diminished responsibility?**



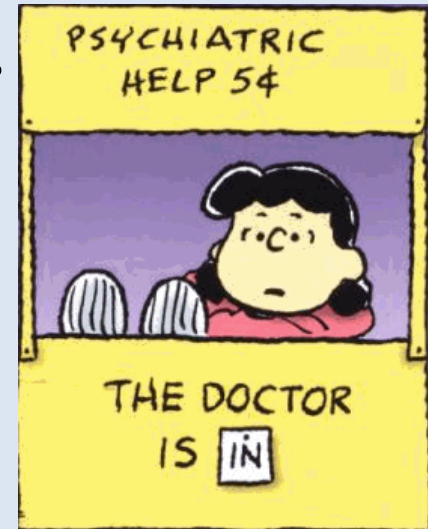
# Cognition: Criminal Thinking Patterns

- **Cognitive psychologists** assume that criminals think differently to non-criminals. They commit crimes due to **distorted or biased** thinking.
- How could psychologists find out what people are thinking?
- Important issue here is **determinism** & how far someone is responsible for their actions.
- **Legal implications:** Plea of diminished responsibility (when a criminal behaviour is due to loss of sanity)



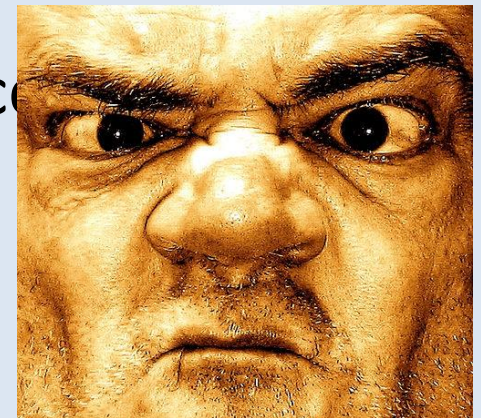
# Cognition: Criminal Thinking Patterns

- **Key Study:** Yochelson & Samenow (1976) ; A Study of Thinking Patterns in Criminals
- **Aims:** To understand criminal personality & establish effective techniques to prevent crime.
- **Participants:** (255) males. Composed of those at the hospital as a result of being found guilty of a crime but insane & those without claim of NGRI.
- They came from a variety of backgrounds.
- No control group was used.
- **Method:** Interviews over many years  
Freudian based therapy (...?)



# Cognition: Criminal Thinking Patterns

- **Findings:** Most criminals dropped out of study; only 30 completed all interviews & only 9 changed.
- Overall criminals:
  - Are **restless, dissatisfied** and **irritable**
  - Want to live a **life of excitement** whatever the cost.
  - **Lack empathy**
  - Feel under **no obligation** to anyone except themselves
  - **Poor at decision-making**
  - Are **habitually angry**
- **Conclusion:** 52 thinking patterns



Turning to crime

distinguishable in criminal – errors in thinking

# Cognition: Criminal Thinking Patterns

- Evaluation of Yochelson & Samenow
- Some Questions to consider:
  - What had happened to the sample by the end of the study?
  - How many completed all of the interviews?
  - Why might patients have lied in their interviews?
  - Why is it a problem that there was no control group?
  - What would an ideal control group be?

# Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

- Suggest a definition for moral development?
- How might it be researched?
- At what age should a child know the difference between right and wrong?





## Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

A woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to produce. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$1,000 which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

Should Heinz have broken into the laboratory to steal the drug for his wife? Why or why not?

# Cognition: Moral Development in Children

- **Kohlberg's** doctoral thesis outlines 6 stages of moral development.
- His arguments were largely drawn from **Piaget's** stages of development.
- **Kohlberg** used the **Heinz dilemma** in order to assess children's moral attitudes and development



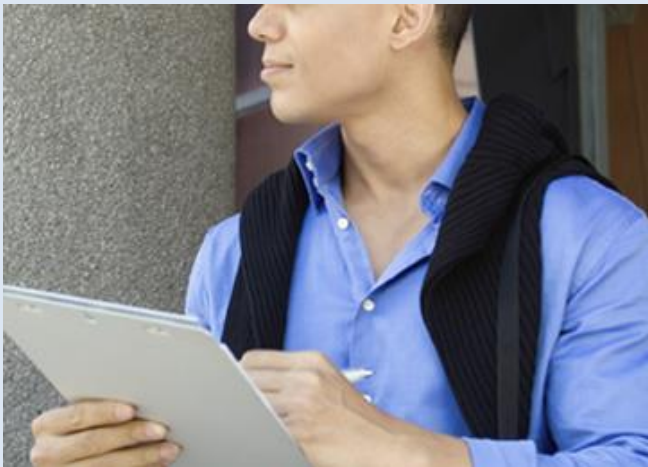
# Cognition: Moral development in Children

- **Key Study:** Kohlberg (1963): Moral Development in Children
- **Aim:** Find evidence to support progression through stages of development
- **Participants:** 58 boys from Chicago, working & middle class. Aged 7, 10, 13, & 16.



# Cognition: Moral development in Children

- **Methodology:** Each boy –two hour interview , 10 dilemmas to solve (eg; Heinz dilemma).  
Some boys followed up at 3 yearly intervals (to 30/36)
- \* **Results:** Younger boys perform at stages 1 & 2, older boys at stages 3 & 4



# Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

- **Kohlberg's** model features three levels:
  - Pre-conventional morality
  - Conventional morality
  - Post-conventional morality
- Within each of these levels are two stages, providing a **six stage model** of moral development.

# Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

## Level One: Pre-conventional morality

- **Stage 1: Obedience and Punishment Orientation.** The child assumes that powerful authorities hand down a fixed set of rules which he or she must unquestioningly obey. Goodness is determined by consequences.
- **Stage 2:** Children conform to rules in order to gain rewards: they will do nice things for others if they think they will benefit.

# Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

**Level Two: Conventional morality:** corresponds to Piaget's concrete operations & increase in understanding of others & decrease in ego-centrism.

- **Stage 3:** At this stage children-usually teens-see morality as more than simple deals.
- They believe that people should live up to the expectations of the family and community and behave in "good" ways. Emphasis on interpersonal feelings.
- **Stage 4: Law and Order Orientation.** Now the emphasis is on obeying laws, respecting authority, and performing one's duties so that the social order is maintained.

# Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

**Level Three: Post-Conventional morality:** internal commitment to individual's set of values:

- **Stage 5:** Moral actions express the will of the majority but also maximise social welfare.
- **Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principles Orientation.** This is marked by self-defined ethical principles that determine right and wrong based on ideas of universal justice & respect for human rights.
- Given this shift to innate morality; what might stage 5 respondents say about Heinz's dilemma?



# Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

- The evidence for progression would suggest a moral development through childhood does take place.
- Support from [Palmer & Hilling \(1998\)](#) also suggests that some criminals show immature reasoning.
- 126 convicted offenders in YOI, Midlands.
- Also [Thornton & Reid \(1982\)](#): crime for financial gain more immature reasoning than violent crime.



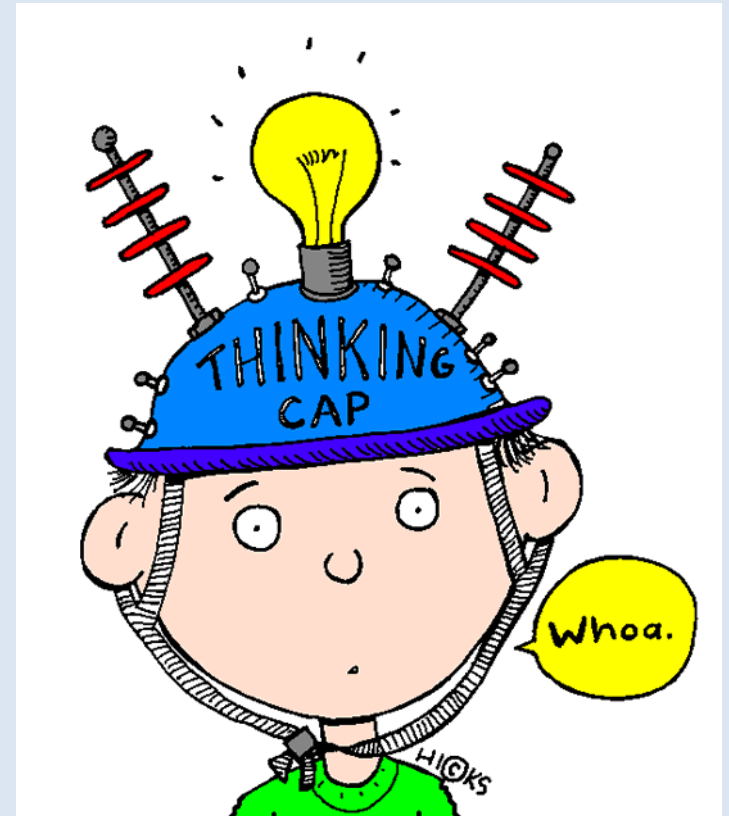
# Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

- **Kohlberg's** findings indicated development across the **first 4 stages** as the focused participants grew in age.
- These findings were **supported cross-culturally**; although progression was slower in non-industrialised societies.
- **No support** was found for **stage 6**.



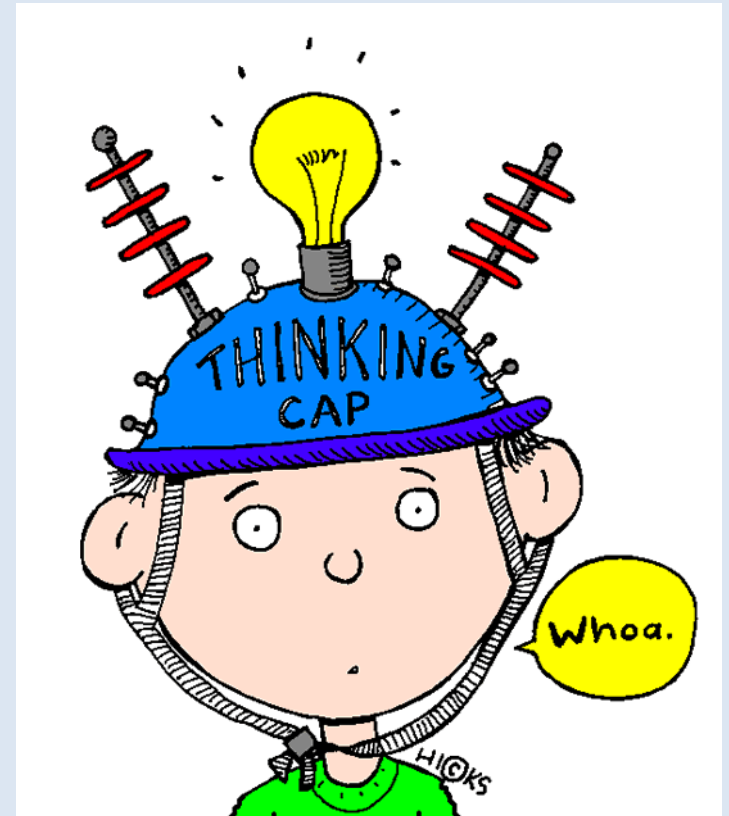
# Cognition: Moral Development and Crime

- Why might the methodology of this study be criticized?



# Cognition: Social Cognition

- What is “social cognition”?



# Cognition: Social Cognition

- What is “social cognition”?
- Social cognition is the way our thoughts are influenced by the people that we mix with.
- As well as how social phenomena can be understood by an individual’s cognitions.



Turning to crime

# Cognition: Social cognition

- By understanding social cognition, we will also understand:
  - Interpersonal processes
  - Intrapersonal processes
  - Intergroup processes

What do these mean?

# Cognition: Social cognition

- By understanding social cognition, we will also understand:
  - **Intrapersonal processes**: within oneself
  - **Interpersonal processes**: between one person and another
  - **Intergroup processes**: between one group and another

# Cognition: Social Cognition

- A criminal's cognition will vary depending on whether the crime is being committed **individually (intrapersonal)** or **within a group/gang (interpersonal and intergroup)**
- Understanding the criminal thought patterns can benefit crime prevention.
- The study of criminal “attributions” has been particularly good in this area.



Turning to crime



# Cognition: Social Cognition

- During the 1990s, Gisli Gudjohnsson conducted a series of studies looking at the relationship between **types of offence and attributions** that criminals make.
- **Attributions** are the explanations that a person gives for another person's behaviour.



# Cognition: Social Cognition

- Gudjohnsson splits attributions into three categories:
  - “internal” versus “external” attributions; where behaviour is seen as caused from either within or social factors.
  - The mental element attribution where criminal behaviour is explained in terms of a mental disposition at the time of the crime.
  - The offender’s remorse/guilt about the offence.

# Cognition: Social Cognition

- **Key Study:** Gudjohnsson and Bownes: The attribution of blame and type of crime committed.
- **Aim:** To look at the relationship between the type of crime and blame attribution.
- **Method:** Using a 42 item **Blame Attribution Inventory (GBAI)** from a previous study, **Gudjohnsson** compared the type of offence committed by an offender to the three dimensions of attribution.

# Cognition: Social Cognition

- **Participants:** 80 criminals in Northern Ireland; split into 3 groups:



Type of Offence	Mean age
Violent offences such as homicide or GBH	29 years
Sexual assaults including paedophilia and rape	From 28 to 41 depending on the type of assault
Property offences including theft and burglary	29 years

# Cognition: Social Cognition

- Results:



Type of Offence	Guilt Attribution Score	Mental element attribution score	External attribution score
Violent offences such as homicide or GBH	8.1	5.3	5.8
Sexual assaults including paedophilia and rape	12.7	5.7	2.4
Property offences including theft and burglary	5.5	5.1	3.4

← This was expected

# Cognition: Social Cognition

- Conclusions: Consistency with earlier findings and across groups was shown in previous studies.
- Comparing NI and English prisoners showed **lower mental and guilt element** but **higher external attributions**.
- This could be explained by the “troubles” in NI during the 1980s and 1990s.



Turning to crime

# Cognition: Social Cognition

- Evaluation:

