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## Social Learning Theory In Practice

Criminology is a wide range of theories being placed in perspective. Criminologists will use Social Learning theory as a way of explaining crime. We will analyze the theory itself through the positive and negative example.

Social learning theory explains connections teach an individual (Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). Ronald L. Akers claims, much like Edwin H. Sutherland, that crime is more likely due to subjection and portraying the behavior witnessed based on how an individual views the law (Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). Social learning results from an individual teaching another the skills for committing crime completing a crime cycle; Sutherland is credited with differential association with social learning being a more broad explanation of Sutherland's theory, but Akers gathered more behavioral concepts such as if an individual does something they may receive reward or punishment from another according to the act they committed and repeat the behavior in order to receive reward and view themselves accordingly (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). Learning, however, is not limited to how a behavior comes into light, but the acts committed foundation (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew and Wilcox 2018). Social learning is broken down into four major concepts: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). Differential association is the course where one gets exposure to definitions of law whether they be in or out of favor of the law; for example, a major definer for an individual is what they see from family and friends and may possibly imitate those individuals (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). So, if an individual comes from a criminal family they are more likely to lead a life of crime upon what they witnessed in their growth process due to the priority, length of time, most often and the relationship closeness (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). Definitions are an individual's own interpretation that connects to certain behaviors defining sense of right and wrong in a given situation; for example, an individual considers theft wrong, but may consider the concept of consuming marijuana okay even though it is illegal, or if an individual has a loathing of a particular activity they are likely avoiding participation (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox, 2018). There will also sometimes be neutralizing, which is rationalizing behaviors, words, etcetera; in examples from Akers would be "I am not at fault", or "I just blew my top" (1994:82 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). However these may be excuses, they are still neutralizing behaviors needing reinforcement (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). Differential reinforcement is the scale of positive and negative reinforcement of a behavior which possibly may result person continuing or stopping a certain behavior (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). The reinforcements can be nonsocial and social, for example, through social reinforcement an individual learns to react to a stimuli as a quality or terrifying source and learns to act accordingly (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). In a nonsocial reinforcement however, there are limitations to only physical stimuli, and another form is also self-reinforcement which is individual taking control of themselves without another's supervision (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). And last of the concepts is imitation. Imitation is taking part in behavior after seeing someone else do it and whether or not it will be repeated relies wholly on the character, behavior witnessed, and witnessed punishment (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). However, it is more valuable in the initial acquisition in acting the behavior than there is in continuation or termination behavior was

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established (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). All of these concepts are related because humans learn from what they get exposed to and begin to adopt the attitudes, behaviors, and defining the law as favorable or not where they picked up during differential association and begin imitating it. Then, the individual will imitate and follow their own definitions of the law and reap or sow their behavior (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018).

Now, we move on to Social Learning critiques and strengths. Beginning with the critiques, Social Learning theory faced opposition due to the testability being tautological, or repetitive; another critique is the temporal sequence of differential association and delinquent behavior; what came first?- delinquent behavior or associating with delinquents?(Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). Research proves interacting with delinquents does not mean the beginning or speeding up the delinquency processes (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). Strengths of this theory include being backed by other researchers confirming validity (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). The findings in each study from others demonstrated all the concepts of Social Learning theory (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018). These include self-reports which had a tie-in to high variance in the factors which are covered by social learning variables, for instance thirty-one to sixty-eight percent of juveniles admitted through self report to substance abuse which was picked up through social learning (Akers 1994 cited in Cullen, Agnew, and Wilcox 2018).

In conclusion, Social Learning theory has been used by criminologists in order to explain the causes of crime. Social learning theory broke it down into the why and how. explains delinquency the best with the empirical evidence backing it.

## References

1. Akers, Ronald L. 1994.'A Social Learning Theory of Crime.' Pp. 79-92 in *Criminological Theory: Past and Present*. 6th ed., edited by F.T. Cullen, R. Agnew, and P. Wilcox. New York: Oxford University Press
2. Cullen, Francis T. Robert Agnew, and Pamela Wilcox. 2018. *Criminological Theory: Past and Present*. 6th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.