CHAPTER 10

Social Process and Control Theories of Crime
INTRODUCTION

People learn rules, morals, and values through a process of socialization. Early socialization usually occurs with the family. During this stage, children start learning how to behave. Ideally, they learn what behavior is appropriate when at home and in public. Socialization also takes place later in life and outside the family context. As individuals grow older, other influential agents of socialization become school and peers. The workplace, community and religious organizations, and countless other entities also contribute to the socialization process.

Most people who have no understanding of criminological theory understand that socialization is important and, possibly, connected to how one behaves later in life. It is well-known, for instance, that broken homes, poor parental control, and child abuse and neglect often lead to certain problems. For example, a child who suffers repeated abuse may be inclined to abuse his or her children in adulthood. Even if one is fortunate enough to grow up in a fully functional family, other outside factors—such as being bullied in school or ridiculed in the workplace—can contribute to inappropriate behavior.

In short, people are influenced by numerous sources, which is why it is useful to examine the role of socialization in criminal behavior. Theories that claim socialization is linked to criminal activity are known as social process theories. Social process theories examine how individuals interact with other individuals and groups. These theories focus carefully on how behavior is learned, internalized, and transmitted between individuals.

This chapter begins with social process theories known as learning theories. Learning theories attempt to explain how and why individuals learn criminal, rather than conforming, behavior. Learning theorists believe that individuals are “socialized” in criminal behavior. For example, learning theorists argue that delinquent peers may contribute to a person’s decision to violate the law. Next, we discuss control theories. Control theories focus on social or personal factors that prevent individuals from engaging in selfish, antisocial behaviors.

A useful way to distinguish between learning and control theories is as follows: Learning theories are concerned with why individuals are socialized into criminal activity (e.g., by witnessing domestic violence over a period of years and then acting abusively in adulthood). By contrast, control theories are concerned with why individuals are not socialized into conforming behavior. That is, what is it about one’s surroundings and upbringing that leads one to follow the rules of society despite a natural disposition to offend?

LEARNING THEORIES

In this section, we review theories that explain the social processes of how and why people engage in criminal behavior through learning. Unlike other theories that assume we are born with offending tendencies (e.g., control theories), virtually all learning theories assume that our attitudes and behavioral decisions are acquired via communication after we are born; thus, individuals enter the world with a blank slate (often referred to as the tabula rasa). Thus, learning theories seek to explain how criminal and noncriminal
CASE STUDY

THE WEAVERS

Ward “Pete” Weaver Jr. was a long-haul truck driver, so he was away from home for lengthy periods of time. In 1978, Pete Weaver was sentenced to prison for a rape conviction. Later, in 1981, Pete Weaver was sentenced to 42 years in prison. He had picked up two runaways; he arranged for a friend to shoot the 18-year-old man and himself repeatedly raped the 15-year-old girl. Weaver Jr.’s truck routes corresponded to 26 unsolved hitchhiker homicides, but he was never charged with those cases. While Weaver Jr. was in prison, he confided to a cellmate that he had murdered another couple. He had beaten 18-year-old Robert Radford to death with a pipe and then kidnapped, raped, and strangled Radford’s 23-year-old fiancée, Barbara Levoy. After killing Levoy, Weaver Jr. buried her behind his rented house in Oroville, California, where he later covered the grave with concrete and built a deck. Weaver Jr. came from a family of extensive violence. He was known to be cruel to his siblings as well as animals.

Ward Francis Weaver III, known as “Little Pete,” is the son of Ward Weaver Jr. Like his father, he is a violent man. He was sentenced to three years in prison for assaulting his pregnant wife. After his release, Ward Weaver continued to be involved in volatile relationships. In 2001, he, along with his girlfriend, moved to Oregon City. One of his daughters befriended classmates at a middle school. These friends would regularly sleep over at the Weaver household. In August 2001, Weaver was accused of attempting to rape one of these girls, Ashley Pond. The claim was not immediately investigated by police. On January 9, 2002, Ashley disappeared. Two months later, another classmate, Miranda Gaddis, disappeared. Their whereabouts were unknown until Ward Weaver’s son Francis dialed 911 because his father had raped his (Francis’s) girlfriend. In that 911 call, Francis stated that his father claimed to have raped and killed the two girls and buried them under a concrete patio. Subsequently, Miranda Gaddis’s body was found in a shed in the backyard; Ashley Pond’s body was buried under the concrete.

Francis Paul Weaver was the stepson of Ward Francis Weaver III. He was the person who turned his stepfather in during the 911 call. In March 2016, Francis Paul Weaver was convicted of the death of Edward Spangler. He, along with two others, had killed Spangler as a result of a drug deal that went bad. While not the actual shooter, Weaver was convicted and sentenced to life for his involvement.

This case study brings up numerous questions, particularly those that focus on how someone’s family can influence his or her behavior. Were these men “born” violent, or was violence something they learned firsthand?

THINK ABOUT IT:

1. Do you think that these men learned these violent tendencies from others in their family?
2. What other factors may have influenced these men (e.g., peers)?
behavior is learned through cultural values people internalize and acquaintances they make. A key feature of learning theories is recognizing the influence of peers and significant others on an individual’s behavior. Three learning theories are discussed in this section, starting with differential association theory.

**Differential Association Theory**

Edwin H. Sutherland is considered one of the most influential criminologists of the 20th century. In the third edition of *Principles of Criminology*, Sutherland fully introduced his differential association theory. He was especially interested in explaining how criminal values and attitudes could be culturally transmitted from one generation to the next. Sutherland was greatly influenced by Shaw and McKay’s concept of social disorganization (see previous chapter). He was also influenced by Gabriel Tarde’s imitation theory, which, as its name suggests, claims that people imitate one another. Tarde formulated three laws of imitation: (1) People imitate one another in proportion as they are in close contact, (2) often the superior is imitated by the inferior, and (3) when two mutually exclusive methods or approaches come together, one method can be substituted for another.

**ELEMENTS OF DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION THEORY.** Sutherland presented his theory of differential association with nine specific statements. The statements are listed below in italics, and each statement is followed by a brief interpretation and clarification.

1. **Criminal behavior is learned.** Criminal behavior is not inherited; rather, a person needs to be trained, or educated, in crime.

2. **Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.** In most instances, this communication is verbal. However, communication can also be nonverbal in nature.

3. **The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups.** Sutherland distinguished personal and impersonal groups. Personal communications between family and friends, he theorized, will have more of an influence than impersonal communications, such as those occurring with simple acquaintances as well as through the movies and other entertainment media.

4. **When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple; and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes.** Criminals learn from others the techniques, methods, and motives necessary to sustain their behavior.

5. **The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable.** Individuals may associate with others who define the legal codes as rules that should be observed; these individuals, however, may also associate with others whose definitions favor violating these legal codes.

6. **A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law.** Sutherland noted that this is the essence of differential association. Individuals can have associations that favor both criminal and noncriminal behavior patterns. A person will engage in criminal behavior when there is an excess of definitions that favor violating the law.

7. **Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.** Frequency and duration refer to how often and how long associations occur. Priority refers to whether an individual has developed a strong sense of lawful behavior during early childhood. Intensity is not precisely defined.
8. The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning. This statement asserts that the process of learning criminal behavior is similar to the process of learning other types of behavior.

9. While criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values, since noncriminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values. Sutherland argued that motives, needs, and values as explanations for criminal behavior are inadequate because they are also explanations for noncriminal behavior. For instance, needing money is a motivation for a thief to steal as well as for a student to get a part-time job. This final proposition was largely an argument against the other dominant social theories of crime at the time when Sutherland wrote—namely, strain theory, which emphasized economic goals and means in predicting criminal activity.

To further elaborate on these principles, it is important to understand the cultural context when Sutherland developed his theory in the early to mid-20th century. At that time, most academics, and society for that matter, believed that there was something abnormal or different about criminals. For example, Sheldon’s body type theory was popular in the same time period, as was the use of IQ (intelligence quotient) to pick out persons who were of lower intelligence and predisposed to crime (both of these theories are covered in Chapter 5). Thus, the common assumption at the time when Sutherland created the principles of differential association theory was that there was something essentially wrong with individuals who committed crime.

In light of this common assumption, it was extremely profound for Sutherland to propose that criminality is learned just as any conventional activity is learned. He asserted that any normal individual, when exposed to definitions and attitudes favorable toward crime, will learn both the motivations and techniques for engaging in illegal behaviors. Furthermore, he proposed the idea that the various learning mechanisms and processes—namely, social interaction—involving in developing criminality are identical to the learning processes of virtually all conventional activities, such as reading, playing football, or riding a bike.

Almost everyone learns to swim or ride a bike from friends, parents, or teachers. In contrast, almost no one learns how to do these activities from reading a book. Instead, we typically learn the techniques (e.g., how to float in a pool or balance and turn on a bike) as well as motivations (e.g., it is pleasurable and fun to do with friends) for engaging in such activities from our significant others. According to Sutherland, crime is learned the same way—through interactions with individuals with whom we are close—and from them we learn both the techniques (e.g., how to hot-wire a car) and the motivations (e.g., taking a “joyride” in a stolen car can be a thrill). Although in modern times most people and researchers take it for granted that criminal behavior is learned, the idea was quite radical when Sutherland presented his theory of differential association.

Still, differential association theory is just as deterministic as were the earlier theories that emphasized biological factors (e.g., stigmata, body types) or psychological factors (e.g., low IQ). In other words, Sutherland strongly felt that if a person was receiving from significant others and internalizing a higher ratio of definitions that breaking the law is beneficial, then that person certainly would engage in illegal behavior (see principle 6 above). So there is virtually no room for any free choice or decision-making in this model of criminal activity. In contrast, individuals’ propensities to commit crimes are determined through social interactions with significant others. Thus, individuals do not actually make decisions to commit (or not commit) criminal acts; rather, we are predetermined to do so, which makes differential association theory as highly positivistic (i.e., deterministic) as any of the preexisting positivistic theories we reviewed in Chapter 5 (e.g., Lombroso’s theory of born criminals).
However, the primary distinction of differential association theory from the earlier positivistic theories is that instead of biological or psychological traits being emphasized as primary factors in causing criminality, it is social interaction and learning. In fact, Sutherland was quite clear in asserting that individual differences in terms of physiological functioning have nothing to do with the development of criminality. It should be noted at this point that this hard stance against biological and psychological factors being relevant as risk factors in criminal activity has been negated by the extant empirical research, which clearly shows that such variations in physiological functioning do in fact significantly influence criminal behavior. In defense of Sutherland, this body of research does suggest that such physiological factors may affect individuals' criminality largely due to the effects of such detriments on the learning processes of people in everyday life.

**CLASSICAL CONDITIONING.** At the time when he developed his theory of differential association, Sutherland used the dominant psychological theory of learning of the early 20th century. This learning model was called classical conditioning and was primarily developed by Pavlov. Classical conditioning assumes that animals, as well as people, learn through associations between stimuli and responses. The organism, animal, or person is a somewhat passive actor in this process, meaning that the individual simply receives various forms of stimuli and responds in natural ways. Furthermore, the organism (or individual) will learn to associate certain stimuli with certain responses over time.

In developing the theory, Pavlov performed seminal research that showed that dogs, which are naturally afraid of loud noises, could be quickly conditioned not only to be less afraid of loud bells but actually to desire and salivate at their ringing. A dog naturally salivates when presented with meat, so when this unconditioned stimulus (meat) is presented, a dog will always salivate (unconditioned response) in anticipation of eating the meat. Pavlov demonstrated through a series of experiments that if a bell (conditioned stimulus) is always rung at the same time as the dog is presented with meat, then the dog will learn to associate what was previously a negative stimulus (loud bell) with a positive stimulus (food). Thus, the dog will quickly begin salivating at the ringing of a bell, even when meat is not presented. When this occurs, it is called an unconditioned response, because it is not natural; however, it is a powerful and effective means of learning, and it can sometimes take only a few occurrences of coupling the ringing bell with meat before the unconditioned response takes place.

A common, real-life example that virtually everyone can relate to is associations related to songs or smells. Specifically, probably every reader has heard a song on the radio that reminded her or him of a good (or bad) event that occurred years before while that same song was playing. It can seem as though we are reexperiencing that event in our minds when we hear the song. Similarly, people diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder can reexperience traumatic events from exposure to certain stimuli. For example, the sound of a car backfiring can remind a war veteran of being under fire in combat. A similar phenomenon occurs with odors, in the sense that a certain scent, such as a particular perfume or cologne, can remind us of someone we once dated. Another version of this experience is when a spouse has to leave for a long time and the pillow retains...
his or her natural scent; this can hold a powerful association with memories and often elicits strong emotions (responses) in the partner or spouse left behind. On a simpler level, the smell of a turkey cooking in the oven may automatically remind us of Thanksgiving (or other holidays).

These are just a couple of the many types of associations typically experienced by people in everyday life, and there are many other forms of this type of learning that virtually all persons experience but may not realize they are experiencing. Still, all involve the primary components of classical conditioning in that they all include a stimulus (e.g., a song), an association with the stimulus, and the resulting response (e.g., good/bad feelings). This is still a highly supported learning model.

Another modern use of this learning model in humans is the prescribed administration of drugs that make people ill when they drink alcohol. Alcoholics are often prescribed drugs that will make them feel sick, often to the point of throwing up, if they ingest any alcohol. The idea behind these drugs is primarily that users will learn to associate feelings of sickness with drinking and that this will thus curb the desire to consume alcohol. One important barrier to this strategy is that many alcoholics do not consistently take the drugs, so they often slip back into addiction. However, in defense of this strategy, if alcoholics were to maintain their prescribed drug regimen, it would likely work, because people do tend to learn effectively through association, which in this case is feelings of nausea (the response) associated with ingesting alcohol (the stimulus).

A similar form of the classical conditioning learning model was prominently used in the critically acclaimed 1964 novel (and subsequent motion picture) *A Clockwork Orange*. In this novel, the author, Anthony Burgess, tells the story of a juvenile murderer who is “rehabilitated” by doctors who force him to watch hour after hour of violent images while simultaneously giving him drugs that make him sick. In the novel, the protagonist is “cured” after only two weeks of this treatment, having learned to consistently associate violence with sickness. However, once he is released he lacks the ability to choose violence and other antisocial behavior, which is seen as losing his humanity. Therefore, the ethicists order a reversal treatment and make him back into his former self, a violent predator. Although a fictional piece, *A Clockwork Orange* is probably one of the best illustrations of the use of classical conditioning in relation to criminal offending and rehabilitation.

**REACTION TO DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION THEORY.** Since Sutherland’s nine statements were published, they have been subjected to significant scrutiny and interpretation. Researchers have been critical of his statements and have also pointed to several “misinterpretations” of his work. For example, some people assume that Sutherland’s theory is concerned only with associations between criminals. If this were the only relevant type of association, then the theory would be invalid, because some people have an association with criminals but are not considered criminals themselves. These people include police officers, corrections officers, and judges.

As indicated, Sutherland theorized that crime occurs when associations favorable to violation of the law “outweigh” associations favorable to conforming to the law. But measuring this ratio and understanding when the balance tips in favor of a criminal lifestyle is all but impossible. Still, some empirical studies have found support for differential association variables, particularly in the area of white-collar crime. For example, one recent study involving a sample of 133 graduate business students found that participants would go against their friends’ and professors’ opinions and commit corporate crime if they felt that their coworkers and superiors at work agreed with the illegal behavior. This study found that the influence of associating with people who have a different set of values—in this case, strong corporate attitudes—on a daily basis can have a
powerful effect on criminal decision-making, even to the point where individuals will do things they know their family and friends feel are immoral. The context of this and other corporate crime studies is interesting because Sutherland actually coined the term white-collar crime and did much of the seminal work on that topic (for more discussion, see Chapter 14). So perhaps it is not so surprising that much of the support for differential association theory is found in the context of corporate crime.

On a related note, Sutherland theorized that criminal associations lead to crime but that the reverse is plausible. That is, one may commit crime and then seek out individuals with attitudes similar to one’s own. This is similar to the “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” debate. Do youths learn to commit crime once they start hanging out with delinquent peers, or do the youths that commit crime start hanging out with similar people (i.e., “Birds of a feather flock together”)? After a rather lengthy literary debate, most recent research points to the occurrence of both causal processes: Criminal associations cause more crime and committing crime causes more criminal associations. Another interesting criticism that has been leveled at differential association theory is the argument that if criminal behavior is learned and people are born with a blank slate (i.e., tabula rasa), then who first committed crime if no one taught that person the techniques and motives for it? After all, if someone was the first to do it, then who could expose that person to the definitions favorable to violation of law? Furthermore, what factor(s) caused that individual to do it first if it was not learned? If the answers to these questions involve any factor(s) other than learning—which they must, because the theory’s assumption is that there was no one to teach this behavior—then the action cannot be explained by learning theories. This is a criticism that cannot be addressed, so it is somewhat ignored in the scientific literature.

At the same time, however, some research is supportive of Sutherland’s theory. For example, researchers have found that young criminals are “tutored” by older ones, that criminals sometimes maintain associations with other criminals prior to their delinquent acts, and that the deviant attitudes, friends, and acts are closely connected. Unfortunately, many of Sutherland’s principles are somewhat vague and cryptic, which does not lend the theory to easy testing. Related to this issue, perhaps one of the biggest problems with Sutherland’s formulation of differential association is that he used primarily one type of learning model—classical conditioning—to formulate most of his principles, which neglects the other important ways we learn attitudes and behavior from significant others. This may be an important reason why his principles are so hard to test, especially in light of more current models of his framework that have incorporated other learning models that are easier to test and provide more empirical validity.

Finally, Sutherland was adamant that such learning about how and why to commit crime occurred only through social interaction with significant others and not via any media role models, such as those in movies or on the radio. Although not surprising in our modern times, it was not long before another theorist, Daniel Glaser, proposed an alternate theory that included the important influence that such media can play in behavior. We will now review Glaser’s theory.
Introduction to Criminology

GLASER’S CONCEPT OF DIFFERENTIAL IDENTIFICATION. As stated above, Sutherland claimed that learning of criminal definitions could take place only through social interactions with significant others as opposed to reading a book or watching movies. However, in 1956, Daniel Glaser proposed the idea of differential identification, which allows for learning to take place not only through people close to us but also through other reference groups, even distant ones such as sports heroes or movie stars whom the individual has never actually met or corresponded with. Glaser claimed that it did not matter much whether the individual had a personal relationship with the reference group(s); in fact, he claimed that they could even be imaginary, such as fictitious characters in a movie or book. Thus, “a person pursues criminal behavior to the extent that he identifies himself with real or imaginary persons from whose perspective his criminal behavior seems acceptable.” The important thing, according to Glaser, was that the individual identify with the person or character and thus behave in ways that fit the norm set of this reference group or person.

Glaser’s proposition has been virtually ignored by subsequent criminological research, with the exception of Dawes’s 1973 study of delinquency, which found that identification with persons other than parents was strong when youths reported a high level of rejection from their parents. Given the profound influence of video games, movies, music, and television on today’s youth culture, it is obvious that differential identification was an important addition to Sutherland’s framework. Thus, far more research should examine the validity of Glaser’s theory in contemporary society. Although Glaser and others modified differential association, the most notable, respected, and empirically valid variation of Sutherland’s model is differential reinforcement theory.

Differential Reinforcement Theory

In the 1960s, a notable study reevaluated Sutherland’s differential association theory and made some pointed criticisms. One of the primary criticisms was that the theory was incomplete without some attention to the more modern psychological models of learning. That is, C. R. Jeffery called out the failure of Sutherland’s model to include the concept that people can be conditioned, via rewards or punishments, into behaving in certain ways. Soon after this critical review, Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers criticized and refined Sutherland’s work in 1966. The product of this follow-up was what is now known as differential reinforcement theory. Burgess and Akers argued that by integrating Sutherland’s work with contributions from the field of social psychology—namely, the learning models of operant conditioning and modeling/imitation—decisions to commit criminal behavior could be more clearly understood.

ELEMENTS OF DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT THEORY. In their 1966 article, Burgess and Akers presented seven propositions to summarize differential reinforcement theory (see Table 10.1)—often referred to as social learning theory in the criminological literature—which largely represent efficient modifications of Sutherland’s original nine principles of differential association. The influence of the relatively new (in 1966) learning models proposed by social psychologists is illustrated in their first statement as well as throughout.

Learning Check 10.1

1. ______________ theories focus on social or personal factors that prevent individuals from engaging in selfish, antisocial behavior.
2. According to Sutherland, criminality is ______________.
3. ______________ assumes that animals, as well as people, learn through associations between stimuli and responses.
4. According to Glaser, ______________ is when learning takes place not only through people close to us but also through other reference groups.

Answers located at www.edge.sagepub.com/schram2e
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the seven principles. Although differential reinforcement incorporates the elements of classical conditioning learning models in its framework, the first proposition clearly states that the essential learning mechanism in social behavior is operant conditioning; thus, it is vital to understand what operant conditioning is and how it is valid at all times in an individual's life. The inclusion of both modern models of learning (e.g., operant conditioning and modeling) and classic models of learning (e.g., classical conditioning) explains why differential reinforcement theory is also commonly referred to as the social learning theory of crime.

DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT THEORY PROPOSITIONS. Differential reinforcement theory may appear, in many ways, to be no different than rational choice theory (see Chapter 4). This is true to some extent, because both models focus on punishments and reinforcements that occur after an individual offends. Differential reinforcement theory, however, can be distinguished from the rational choice perspective in that it assumes humans are born with an innate capacity for rational decision-making, whereas the differential reinforcement perspective assumes individuals are born with a blank slate (i.e., tabula rasa) and thus must be socialized and taught how to behave through various forms of conditioning (e.g., classical and operant conditioning) and modeling. Also, differential reinforcement theory is far more deterministic than rational choice theory in the sense that the former assumes that individuals have virtually no free will or free choice (behavior is based on the definitions, beliefs, rewards, punishments, etc., that individuals are subject to after their previous behaviors), whereas the latter is based almost entirely on the assumption that individuals do indeed have the ability to make their own choices and tend to make calculated decisions based on the contextual circumstances of a given situation. Thus, it is clear that differential reinforcement theory has different assumptions, as well as distinctive concepts, that clearly distinguish it from rational choice models of behavior. We will now review some of the key concepts that differential reinforcement theory proposed that were important additions to the differential association model and that made it a far more robust and valid theory for explaining criminal behavior.

Differential Reinforcement Theory Propositions

1. Criminal behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning.
2. Criminal behavior is learned both in nonsocial situations that are reinforcing or discriminative and through that social interaction in which the behavior of other persons is reinforcing or discriminative for criminal behavior.
3. The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs in those groups which comprise the individual's major source of reinforcements.
4. The learning of criminal behavior, including specific techniques, attitudes, and avoidance procedures, is a function of the effective and available reinforcers, and the existing reinforcement contingencies.
5. The specific class of behaviors which are learned and their frequency of occurrence are a function of the reinforcers which are effective and available, and the rules or norms by which these reinforcers are applied.
6. Criminal behavior is a function of norms which are discriminative for criminal behavior, the learning of which takes place when such behavior is more highly reinforced than noncriminal behavior.
7. The strength of criminal behavior is a direct function of the amount, frequency, and probability of its reinforcement.

In this section, we provide an example of a person (named Trent) who committed murder, largely due to influences from social interactions with his peers, who were fellow gang members. This illustrates an example of Sutherland’s differential association theory, which will be discussed further below. But before we get to the actual example, it is important to understand murder or criminal homicide as well as some current statistics on this criminal act.

According to common law, as well as traditionally in the United States, the crime of murder is defined as the “unlawful killing of a human being by another human being with malice aforethought.” However, proving malice aforethought is sometimes difficult, because, under the modern interpretation, it is not necessary to prove either malice as it is commonly defined, nor forethought. Therefore, it is preferable not to rely upon this misleading expression for an understanding of murder.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), murder and nonnegligent manslaughter are defined as the “willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another.” The UCR Program does not include such incidents as deaths caused by negligence, suicide, or accident; justifiable homicides; or attempts to murder or assaults to murder, which are counted as aggravated assaults. Based on the 2014 report, the FBI summarized the following key findings concerning murder:

**Figure 10.1**

**Murder by Weapon in 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapon Type</th>
<th>Number of Murders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firearms</td>
<td>8,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knives or cutting instruments</td>
<td>1,567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other weapon or weapon not stated</td>
<td>830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal weapons (hands, fists, feet, etc.)</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blunt objects (clubs, hammers, etc.)</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asphyxiation</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangulation</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcotics</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowning</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poison</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosives</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• About 14,249 people were murdered nationwide in 2014. This is a 0.5% decrease from 2013 and a 3.2% decrease from 2010.
• Of the number of murders nationwide, 46.0% were in the South, 20.5% were in the Midwest, 20.5% were reported in the West, and 13.1% were reported in the Northeast.

Figure 10.1 provides a summary of the types of weapons used in these murders. Note that more than two thirds of the murders involved a firearm (67.9%), followed by knives or cutting instruments (13.1%).

There are instances when individuals, accused of murder, provide some type of defense to justify their criminal actions. For instance, self-defense is most often used as a defense in homicide cases. The defendant must show some evidence of the following to make such a claim:

- Unlawful force was threatened against him or her.
- Danger of harm was imminent.
- He or she was not the aggressor.
- He or she fully believed that danger existed.
- Force was necessary to avert the danger.
- The type and amount of force used was necessary.

The jury is then required to determine whether the defendant’s perception of the need of self-defense, or the degree of force used, was reasonable. Another defense is the insanity defense. Throughout American history, the insanity defense has varied. We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 7.

A well-known case using a diminished-capacity defense occurred in 1978, when Dan White shot and killed San Francisco mayor George Moscone and San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk. His diminished-capacity defense was termed the “Twinkie Defense” by the media. It was based on psychological testimony revealing that Dan White’s junk-food diet exacerbated a chemical imbalance in his brain. Thus, he was not deemed legally responsible for these deaths.

To clarify key aspects of differential association, we apply this perspective to the crime of murder. Trent had a troubled family life and difficulties in school. He did not easily establish and maintain close relationships with his family or friends. When Trent was 12 years old, he was befriended by a couple of boys in his neighborhood. He would spend a great deal of time with these boys, and these boys were part of a local gang. In this gang, Trent learned how to shoplift, burglarize homes and businesses, and sell drugs. He also learned how to use a gun. Soon he began to incorporate beliefs such as, one has to “take what one wants” rather than “work hard and wait for the rewards.” This attitude illustrates an excess of definitions favorable to violating the law over definitions unfavorable to violating the law.

When Trent was 16 years old, he and some of his fellow gang members spotted a man driving a very expensive car. They decided to carjack the automobile at any cost. They waited until the man was at a red light and pulled their car alongside his. Given his previous internalization of the techniques and motivations provided by fellow gang members as well as their encouragement just prior to the incident, Trent got out through the passenger-side door and told the man to get out of his car. The man refused, so Trent shot him once in the head. Trent then dragged the man out of the car and slid into the driver’s seat and drove away. A number of eyewitnesses immediately called 911. Two days later, Trent was arrested and charged with murder.

Incorporating Sutherland’s differential association, we can argue that Trent learned to engage in criminal activity through his friends. This learning process also involved Trent being exposed to definitions and attitudes favorable toward crime, which ultimately resulted in Trent committing murder because he wanted an automobile “at any cost.”

THINK ABOUT IT
By incorporating Sutherland’s differential association, consider the following:
1. What influenced Trent to engage in criminal activity?
2. Was he more likely to be exposed to definitions favorable, or unfavorable, to crime?
3. What could have deterred Trent to engage in criminal activity?

PSYCHOLOGICAL LEARNING MODELS
Operant Conditioning
Operant conditioning was primarily developed by B. F. Skinner, who coincidentally was just across campus from Edwin Sutherland when he was developing differential association theory at Indiana University; just as it is now, academia tended to be too intradisciplinary and intradepartmental. If Sutherland had been aware of Skinner’s studies and theoretical development, he likely would have included it in his original framework of differential
In this section, we examine findings from data provided by the sixth through eighth United Nations Crime Surveys and data from the World Health Organization regarding homicide rates in various world subregions.

The data in Figure 10.2 reveal that of the world subregions included in this study, Southern Africa has, by far, the highest rate of homicide at 31 (per 100,000/year). The second-highest region—Central America—is a not-so-distant second at 26.5, and the third-ranking subregion—South America—is close to the second at 23.5. It is also notable that the world average is 6.2, which would likely be significantly lower if there wasn’t such a high outlier at the top (Southern Africa). In fact, if we removed the world ranking from this report, and chose to use the median (instead of the mean or average) as our measure of central tendency of the 16 subregions presented in the report, then the world average would be about 5.8 (per 100,000/year).

Also notable is North America (which of course includes the United States) at a rate of 6.8, which is below the world average (8.2). Perhaps most interesting is the rate reported for North Africa (0.8), which is the lowest reported, despite being on the same continent as the highest recorded rate (Southern Africa). This just goes to show how certain locations, often in close proximity, can be entirely different in terms of crime. This can also be seen on a more local level, such as in cities in Southern California (e.g., Mission Viejo, Thousand Oaks) that are some of the safest communities in the United States virtually every year, while some close cities in that region (e.g., Compton, San Bernardino) typically have some of the highest rates of crime. It is quite amazing that some of the cities in our nation or regions in the world can have such drastic differences regarding crime rates. This just goes to show how variant places can be, even if they are relatively close in proximity or in the same geographic area.
association theory. However, operant conditioning was not well-known or researched at the time Sutherland developed his theory of differential association; rather, he simply incorporated the dominant learning model of his time—classical conditioning. So it was up to others, such as Burgess and Akers, to later incorporate operant conditioning (as well as Bandura’s social learning principles, discussed below) into Sutherland’s theoretical model.

To explain it simply, operant conditioning is concerned with how behavior is influenced by reinforcements and punishments. Operant conditioning assumes that the animal or human is a proactive player in seeking out rewards, not just a passive entity that simply receives stimuli, which is what classical conditioning assumes. Specifically, certain behaviors are encouraged through reward (positive reinforcement) or through avoidance of punishment (negative reinforcement). For example, if a child is given a toy or video game for doing well on his or her report card, that is a positive reinforcement. On the other hand, if a child who has been confined to his or her room after school for a week for not doing homework is then allowed to start playing with friends again after school because he or she did a good job on homework the following week, this is a negative reinforcement because the child is now being rewarded via the avoidance of something negative. Like different types of reinforcement, punishment also comes in two forms. Thus, behavior is discouraged, or weakened, via adverse stimuli (positive punishment) or lack of reward (negative punishment). A good example of positive punishment would be putting a child in a “time-out,” where he or she is forced to sit alone for many minutes—a punishment that tends to be quite effective with young children. Another form of positive punishment—perhaps the best example—is “spanking,” but this has been frowned on in recent times because it is certainly a positive form of a negative stimulus. So anything that directly presents negative sensations or feelings is a positive punishment. On the other hand, if parents take away their child’s opportunity to go on an outing with friends (say to a movie or theme park) because he or she skipped school, this is an example of negative punishment because the parents are removing a positive aspect or reward.

positive reinforcement: a concept in social learning in which people are rewarded by receiving something they want.

negative reinforcement: a concept in social learning in which people are rewarded through removal of something they dislike.
One notable example of operant conditioning is teaching a mouse to successfully run a maze. When the mouse takes the right paths and finishes the maze quickly, it is either positively reinforced (e.g., rewarded with a piece of cheese) or negatively reinforced (e.g., not shocked with an electric prod, as it was when it chose the wrong path). On the other hand, when the mouse takes wrong turns or does not complete the maze in adequate time, it is either positively punished (e.g., shocked with electricity) or negatively punished (e.g., not given the cheese). Mice, like humans, tend to learn the correct behavior extremely fast using such consistent implementation of punishments and reinforcements.

Especially in humans, such principles of operant conditioning can be found even at very early ages. In fact, many of us have implemented such techniques (or been subjected to them) without really knowing they were called operant conditioning. For example, during “toilet training,” we teach our children to use the toilet rather than urinating and defecating in their pants. To reinforce the act of going to the bathroom on a toilet, we encourage the correct behavior by presenting positive rewards, which can be as simple as showing extreme pleasure and hugging the child or giving the child a “treat.” While modern parents rarely use spanking in toilet training, there is an inherent positive punishment for children who use the bathroom in their pants; specifically, they have to stay in their dirty diaper for a while and face the embarrassment most children feel when this happens. Also, negative punishments are present in such situations because they do not get the positive recognition or treats, so the rewards are absent as well.

A large amount of research has shown that humans learn attitudes and behavior best through a mix of punishments and reinforcements throughout life. For example, studies have clearly shown that rehabilitative programs that appear to work most effectively in reducing recidivism in offenders are those that have many opportunities for rewards as well as threats for punishments. To clarify, empirical research that has combined the findings from hundreds of studies of rehabilitation programs has demonstrated that the programs that are most successful in changing the attitudes and behavior of previous offenders are those that offer at least four reward opportunities for every one punishment aspect of the program.40 So whether it is training children to use the toilet or altering criminals’ thinking and behavior, operant conditioning is a well-established form of learning that makes differential reinforcement theory a more valid and specified model of offending than differential association.

Thus, whether deviant or conforming behavior occurs and continues “depends on the past and present rewards or punishment for the behavior, and the rewards and punishment attached to alternative behavior.”41 This is in stark contrast to Sutherland’s differential association model, which looked only at what happens before an act (i.e., classical conditioning), not what happens after (i.e., operant conditioning). Burgess and Akers’s model looks at both what occurs before the act and what occurs afterward. Thus, illegal behavior is likely to occur, as Burgess and Akers theorized, when its perceived rewards outweigh the potential punishments for committing such acts.

**BANDURA’S THEORY OF IMITATION/MODELING.** Burgess and Akers emphasized another learning model in their formulation of differential reinforcement theory, which was imitation and modeling. Given that Sutherland’s original formulation of differential association
theory was somewhat inspired by Tarde’s concept of imitation, it is surprising that his nine principles did not adequately emphasize the importance of modeling in the process of learning behavior. Similar to the neglect of acknowledging Skinnerian models of operant conditioning, Sutherland’s failure to focus on imitation and modeling was likely due to the fact that the primary work by Albert Bandura in this area had not become well-known at the time when differential association theory was being formulated.

Bandura demonstrated, through a series of theoretical and experimental studies, that a significant amount of learning takes place absent virtually any form of conditioning or responses to a given behavior. To clarify, he claimed that individuals can learn even if they are not punished or rewarded for a given behavior (i.e., operant conditioning) or exposed to associations between stimuli and responses (i.e., classical conditioning). Instead, Bandura proposed that people learn much of their attitudes and behavior from simply observing the behavior of others—namely, through mimicking others. This type of phenomenon is often referred to as “monkey see, monkey do”—but not just monkeys do this. Social psychological research has clearly established that humans, as well as most animal species, are physiologically “hardwired” (meaning it is instinctive) to observe and learn the behavior of others, especially those older in years, to see what behavior is essential for success and survival.

The most important finding of Bandura’s experiments was that simply observing the behavior of others, especially adults, can have profound learning effects on the behavior of children. To clarify, in Bandura’s experiments, a randomized experimental group of children watched a video of adults acting aggressively toward a Bo-Bo doll (a blow-up plastic doll), and a control group of children did not watch such illustrations of adults beating up the dolls. These different groups of children were then sent into a room containing Bo-Bo dolls. The experimental group who had seen the adult behavior mimicked this behavior by acting far more aggressively toward the dolls than did the children in the control group, who had not seen the adults beating up the dolls. So although the experimental group was not provided with previous associations or rewards for being more aggressive toward the dolls, the children who had seen adults act more aggressively became far more aggressive themselves (compared with the control group) simply because they were imitating or modeling what they had seen the older people do.

In light of these findings, Bandura’s theory of modeling and imitation has implications not only for the criminal behavior of individuals but also for the influence of television, movies, video games, and so on. The influences demonstrated by Bandura simply supported a phenomenon we can see in everyday life—namely, the source of fashion trends, such as wearing low-slung pants or baseball hats a certain way. These types of styles tend to ebb and flow based on respected persons (often celebrities) wearing clothing a certain way, which leads to many people, typically youth, mimicking that behavior. This can be seen very early in life, with parents having to be careful what they say and do because their children, as young as two years old, will imitate them. For example, this is why parents often must change their language when in the presence of toddlers. This continues throughout life, especially in teenage years, as young people imitate the “cool” trends and styles as well as behavior. Of course, sometimes this behavior is illegal, but individuals are often simply mimicking the way their friends or others are behaving, with little regard for potential rewards or punishments. Thus, Bandura’s theory of modeling and imitation adds a great deal of explanation to a model of learning, and differential reinforcement theory included such influences; Sutherland’s model of differential association did not, largely because the psychological perspective had not yet been developed.

**REACTION TO DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT THEORY.** Just as Sutherland’s work has been interpreted and criticized, so too has that of Burgess and Akers. For instance, Reed Adams criticized the theory for incorrectly and incompletely applying the principles of operant conditioning. Further, Adams noted that the theory does not adequately address the...
importance of “nonsocial reinforcement.” Nonsocial reinforcement can be considered self-reinforcement. For example, if someone gets enjoyment out of abusing others, then the person can be considered “reinforced” through nonsocial means.

Perhaps the most important criticism of differential reinforcement theory is that it appears tautological, which means that the variables and measures used to test its validity are true by definition. To clarify, studies testing this theory have been divided into four groups of variables or factors: associations, reinforcements, definitions, and modeling. Some critics have noted that if individuals who report that they associate with those who offend are rewarded for offending, believe offending is good, and have seen many of their significant others offend, they will be more likely to offend. In other words, if your friends and/or family are doing it, there is little doubt that you will also do it. For example, critics would argue that a person who primarily hangs out with car thieves, knows he will be rewarded for stealing cars, believes stealing cars is good and not immoral, and has observed many respected others stealing cars will inevitably commit auto theft himself. However, it has been well argued that such criticisms of tautology are not valid because none of these factors necessarily make offending by the respondent true by definition.

Differential reinforcement theory has been criticized in the same way as Sutherland’s theory has, in the sense that delinquent associations may take place after criminal activity rather than before. However, Burgess and Akers’s model clearly addresses this area of criticism, because differential reinforcement covers what comes after the activity. Specifically, it addresses the rewards or punishments that follow criminal activity, whether those rewards come from friends, parents, or other members or institutions of society.

It is arguable that differential reinforcement theory may have the most empirical validity of any contemporary (nonintegrated) model of criminal offending, especially considering that studies have examined a variety of behaviors, ranging from drug use to property crimes to violence. The theoretical model has also been tested in samples across the United States, as well as in other cultures such as South Korea, with the evidence being quite supportive of the framework. Furthermore, a variety of age groups have been examined, ranging from teenagers to middle-aged adults to the elderly, with all studies providing support for the model. Specifically, researchers have empirically tested differential association–reinforcement theory and found that the major variables of the theory have a significant effect in explaining marijuana and alcohol use among adolescents. The researchers concluded that the “study demonstrates that central learning concepts are amenable to meaningful questionnaire measurement and that social learning theory can be adequately tested with survey data.” Other studies have also supported the theory when attempting to understand delinquency, cigarette smoking, and drug use. One recent empirical study—a meta-analysis of virtually all the scientific studies that have tested differential reinforcement/social learning theory—concluded that there was considerable variation in the magnitude and stability of key variables in the theory. Specifically, in this comprehensive study, the effects of all variables—differential association, definitions, modeling/imitation, and differential reinforcement—were typically significant predictors. However, the study showed that although the former two concepts (differential association and definitions) showed stronger magnitude in terms of explaining criminal behavior, the latter two (differential reinforcement and modeling/imitation) had only modest effects on such behavior. Overall, the model appeared to be relatively supported by the extant empirical evidence. Therefore, the inclusion of three psychological learning models—namely, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and modeling/imitation—appears to have made differential reinforcement one of the most valid theories of human behavior, especially in regard to criminal behavior. Thus, it appears that differential reinforcement/social learning theory is one of the more valid theories in terms of explaining criminal behavior; perhaps due to the theory’s incorporation of so many distinct concepts and learning theories in its primary assumptions and propositions.
Neutralization theory is associated with Gresham Sykes and David Matza’s *Techniques of Neutralization* and Matza’s *Drift Theory*. Like Sutherland, both Sykes and Matza claimed that social learning influences delinquent behavior, but they also claimed that most criminals hold conventional beliefs and values. More specifically, Sykes and Matza argued that most criminals are still partially committed to the dominant social order. According to Sykes and Matza, youths are not immersed in a subculture committed to extremes of either complete conformity or complete nonconformity. Rather, these individuals vacillate, or drift, between these two extremes:

The delinquent *transiently* exists in a limbo between convention and crime, responding in turn to the demands of each, flirting now with one, now the other, but postponing commitment, evading decision. Thus, he [or she] drifts between criminal and conventional action.

While still partially committed to conventional social order, youths can drift into criminal activity and avoid feelings of guilt for these actions by justifying or rationalizing their behavior. Why is it called neutralization theory? People justify and rationalize behavior through “neutralizing” it, or making it seem less serious. In other words, individuals make up situational excuses for behavior they know is wrong, and they do this to alleviate the guilt they feel for committing such immoral acts. In many ways, this technique for alleviating guilt resembles Freud’s defense mechanisms (see Chapter 6), which allow our mind to forgive ourselves for the bad things we do even though we know they are wrong. So the specific techniques of neutralization outlined by Sykes and Matza in 1957, which we consider next, are much like excuses for inappropriate behavior.

**Techniques of Neutralization**

Sykes and Matza developed methods, or *techniques of neutralization*, that people use to justify their criminal behavior. These techniques allow people to neutralize their criminal and delinquent acts by making them look as though they are conforming to the rules of society. Individuals are then freed to engage in criminal activities without serious damage to their self-image. These five techniques of neutralization include the following:

1. *Denial of responsibility.* Denial of responsibility is more than just claiming that deviant acts are an accident. Rather, individuals may claim that due to outside forces (e.g., uncaring parents, bad friends, poverty), they are not responsible or accountable for their behavior. Statements such as “It wasn’t my fault” are extremely common among both youth and adult offenders.

2. *Denial of injury.* Criminals may evaluate their wrongful behavior in terms of whether anyone was hurt by it. For instance, vandalism may be considered “mischief”; stealing a car may be viewed as “borrowing.” Sometimes society agrees with people who evaluate their wrongfulness in this manner, designating these activities as “pranks.”

3. *Denial of the victim.* While criminals may accept responsibility for their actions and admit these actions caused an injury, they neutralize them as being a rightful retaliation or punishment. Criminals may perceive themselves as avengers and the victim as the wrongdoer. For instance, vandalism is revenge on an unfair teacher, and shoplifting is retaliation against a “crooked” store owner. Another variation is when shoplifters claim that no one is getting hurt because the stores have theft insurance, failing to acknowledge that stores raise their prices to counteract such losses and higher insurance premiums.

**Techniques of neutralization:** a theory that suggests that individuals, especially in their teenage years and early adulthood, make excuses to alleviate guilt related to committing certain criminal acts.
4. **Condemnation of the condemners.** Criminals may also shift the focus of attention from their deviant acts to the motives and behavior of those who disapprove of these actions. They may claim the condemners are hypocrites, deviants in disguise, or compelled by personal spite. For instance, one may claim that police are corrupt, teachers show favoritism, or parents “take it out” on their children. Thus, criminals neutralize their behavior through “a rejection of the rejectors.”

5. **Appeal to higher loyalties.** Criminals may sacrifice the rules of the larger society for the rules of the smaller social groups to which they belong, such as a gang or peer group. They do not necessarily deviate, because they reject the norms of the larger society. Rather, their higher loyalty is with these smaller groups; thus, they subscribe to the norms of these groups over general social norms. They may claim that one must “always help a buddy” or “never squeal on a friend.” Another example of this neutralization technique is antiabortion radicals who shoot doctors who perform abortions; they claim they are appealing to a higher loyalty (a supreme being), which relieves them from responsibility and guilt.

Sykes and Matza emphasized that the techniques of neutralization may not be strong enough to protect individuals from their own internalized values and the reactions of conforming others. Instead, neutralization techniques lessen “the effectiveness of social controls” and “lie behind a large share of delinquent behavior.”

One area where techniques of neutralization have been applied is white-collar crime. Several studies have examined the tendency to use such excuses to alleviate guilt for engaging in behavior that professionals know is wrong. For example, a recent study that examined the decision-making of 133 students in a graduate business program found that not only did neutralizing attitudes have significant effects on the respondents’ decisions to commit corporate crime (involving distributing a dangerous drug), but the older students—namely, those with more seniority and experience in the business world—were more likely to employ techniques of neutralization.

Furthermore, studies of corporate crime have identified two more common types of excuses that white-collar criminals use in their illegal activities. Specifically, the two techniques of neutralization that experts have observed primarily among corporate criminals are “defense of necessity” and “metaphor of the ledger.” Defense of necessity implies that an individual should not feel shame or guilt about doing something immoral as long as the behavior is perceived as necessary. Often in the corporate world, the climate puts pressure on the bottom line, and all that matters is making a larger profit, no matter what behavior is used; in other words, criminal activity is often seen as a necessity.

The other neutralizing technique found primarily in corporate settings is metaphor of the ledger, which essentially is the belief that an individual or group has done so much good (e.g., provided a useful product or service for public consumption) that he or she is...
entitled to mess up by doing something illegal (e.g., “cooking the books” or knowingly distributing a faulty, dangerous product). Many of us likely use this latter technique often, especially when it comes to studying or writing a paper right before the test or deadline. At times when we know we should be working, we may often say something along the lines of, “I worked hard yesterday, so even though I am not close to being finished, I deserve to go out with my friends to the beach today.” This is a good example of using the fact that you did a good thing to justify doing something you know you probably shouldn’t if you want to do well on the test or paper. So it is not just in corporate climates that these neutralizing techniques—seven altogether—are used to alleviate guilt. Regular people, especially college students and professors, use them all the time.

### Reaction to Neutralization Theory

Studies that have attempted to empirically test neutralization theory are, at best, inconclusive. Robert Agnew argued that there are essentially two general criticisms of studies that support neutralization theory. The first challenge is that several researchers have improperly measured the acceptance of neutralization techniques. Based on his research on neutralization among incarcerated adults, one researcher noted that the relationships between vocabularies of motive and criminal behavior are more subtle, complex, and situation-specific than previously recognized. The major tasks for subsequent neutralization research are to empirically distinguish between neutralization and unconventional commitment.

Second, researchers have expressed concern that criminals may use techniques of neutralization prior to committing a criminal offense. This ordering, they claim, is just as plausible as when neutralization follows a criminal act. This uncertain time-order problem is due to research conducted at a single point in time. Additional research conducted over time could prove supportive of neutralization theory. However, some would argue that the temporal ordering problem is not a major criticism of the theory, because some individuals may be predisposed to make up such rationalizations for their behavior regardless of whether they do it before or after the offending act. Such a propensity may be related to low self-control theory, which we examine later in this chapter.

### Control Theories

The learning theories discussed in the previous section assume that individuals are born with a conforming disposition, or at least a blank slate (i.e., tabula rasa). By contrast, control theories assume that all people would naturally commit crimes if not for restraints on the selfish tendencies that exist in every individual. Social control perspectives of criminal behavior thus assume that there is some type of basic human nature and that all human beings exhibit antisocial tendencies toward being violently aggressive and taking from others what they want. Therefore, such control theories are more concerned with
explaining why individuals don't commit crime or deviant behaviors. Specifically, control theorists rhetorically ask, “What is it about society, human interaction, and other factors that causes people not to act on their natural impulses?”

The assumption that people have innate antisocial tendencies is a controversial one because it is nearly impossible to test. Nevertheless, some recent evidence supports the idea that human beings are inherently selfish and antisocial by nature. Specifically, researchers have found that most individuals are oriented toward selfish and aggressive behaviors at a very early age, with such behaviors peaking at the end of the second year (see Figure 10.4). Such studies are observational and examine children interacting with their peers. But it is clear from such studies that young individuals are predisposed toward selfish, physically aggressive behavior.

An example of antisocial dispositions appearing early in life was reported by Tremblay and LeMarquand, who found that for most young children (particularly boys), aggressive behaviors peaked at 27 months. These behaviors included hitting, biting, and kicking. Their research is not isolated; virtually all developmental experts acknowledge that toddlers exhibit a tendency to show aggressive behaviors toward others. We are sure virtually all readers can relate to this, even if they don’t have children of their own. All one needs to do is observe a typical preschool playground, and one will see numerous “felonies” occur in a short period of time. The bottom line is that the “terrible twos” is a true phenomenon; most individuals exhibit a high tendency toward violence, as well as stealing from others, at this time in life. This line of research would seem to support the notion that people are predisposed toward antisocial, even criminal, behavior.

Control theorists do not necessarily assume that people are predisposed toward crime in a way that remains constant throughout life. On the contrary, research shows that most individuals begin to desist from such behaviors after age two. This trend continues until about age five, with only the most aggressive individuals (i.e., chronic offenders) continuing into higher ages. Furthermore, this extreme desistance from engaging in such
antisocial behavior supports the control perspective in explaining criminal behavior, especially in the long term, because it is clear from these scientific studies that something must be controlling virtually all individuals (who previously showed tendencies toward aggressive, antisocial behavior) to inhibit themselves from carrying out their natural propensities to fight and take at will.

When considering potential factors that inhibit individuals from following their instincts, it is important to note that at the same time selfish and aggressive behaviors decline, self-consciousness is formed. Specifically, it is around age two when individuals begin to see themselves as entities or beings; prior to age two, children have no understanding that they are people. Subsequently, during this second year, various social emotions—such as shame, guilt, empathy, and pride—begin to appear, largely because they become possible in children’s knowing that they are part of a society. This observation is critical because it is what separates control theories from the classical school of criminology and the predispositional theories that we already discussed. According to control theories, without appropriate socialization or personal inhibitions, people will act on their “pre-programmed” tendency toward crime and deviance.

In short, control theories claim that all individuals have natural tendencies to commit selfish, antisocial, and even criminal behavior. So what curbs this natural propensity? Many experts believe the best explanation is that individuals are socialized and controlled by social attachments and investments in conventional society. Others claim that there are internal mechanisms (such as self-control or self-conscious emotions, such as shame, guilt, etc.), but even those are likely a product of the type of environment in which one is raised. This assumption regarding the vital importance of early socialization is probably the primary reason why control theories are currently among the most popular and accepted theories for criminologists. We will now discuss several early examples of these control theories.

**Early Control Theories of Human Behavior**

**THOMAS HOBBES’S SOCIAL CONTRACT.** Although control theories are found in a variety of disciplines, perhaps the earliest notable form of social control in explaining deviant behavior is found in a perspective offered by the 17th-century Enlightenment philosopher Thomas Hobbes (see Chapter 3). Hobbes claimed that the natural state of humanity was one of greediness and self-centeredness, which led to a chaotic state of constant warfare among individuals. In this state, Hobbes claimed that individuals were essentially looking out for their own well-being, and without any law or order there was no way to protect themselves. But Hobbes also theorized that this constant state of chaos created such fear among many individuals that it resulted in them coming together to rationally develop a pact that would prevent such chaos. This became the concept of a society. Hobbes claimed that by creating a society and forming binding contracts (or laws), this would alleviate the chaos by deterring individuals from violating others’ rights. However, despite such laws, Hobbes doubted that the innately greedy nature of humans would be completely eliminated. Rather, the existence of such innate selfishness and aggressiveness was exactly why the use of punishments was necessary, their purpose being to induce fear in the societal members who choose to violate the societal law. In a way, Hobbes was perhaps the first deterrence theorist in the sense that he was the first notable theorist to emphasize the use of punishment to deter individuals from violating the rights of others.
ÉMILE DURKHEIM’S IDEA OF COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE. Consistent with Hobbes’s view of individuals being naturally selfish, Emile Durkheim proposed a theory of social control in the late 1800s that suggested humans have no internal mechanism to let them know when they are fulfilled. To this end, Durkheim coined the terms automatic spontaneity and awakened reflection. Automatic spontaneity can be understood in reference to animals’ eating habits. Specifically, animals stop eating when they are full and are content until they are hungry again; they don’t start hunting again right after they have filled their stomachs. In contrast, awakened reflection concerns the fact that humans do not have such an internal regulatory mechanism. People often acquire resources beyond what is immediately required. Durkheim went so far as to say that “our capacity for feeling is in itself an insatiable and bottomless abyss.” This is one of the reasons Durkheim believed crime and deviance are quite normal, even essential, in any society.

Durkheim’s “awakened reflection” has become commonly known as greed. People tend to favor better conditions and additional fulfillment because we apparently have no biological or psychological mechanism to limit such tendencies. As Durkheim noted, the selfish desires of mankind “are unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone. . . . The more one has, the more one wants.” Thus, society must step in and provide the “regulative force” that keeps humans from acting too selfishly.

One of the primary elements of this regulative force is the collective conscience, which is the extent of similarities or likenesses that people share. For example, almost everyone can agree that homicide is a serious and harmful act that should be avoided in any civilized society. The notion of collective conscience can be seen as an early form of the idea of social bonding, which has become one of the dominant theories in criminology, discussed later in this chapter. According to Durkheim, the collective conscience serves many functions in society. One such function is the ability to establish rules that inhibit individuals from following their natural tendencies toward selfish behavior. Durkheim also believed that crime allows people to unite together in opposition against deviants. In other words, crime and deviance allow conforming individuals to be “bonded” together in opposition against a common enemy, as can be seen in everyday life. This enemy consists of the deviants who have not internalized the code of the collective conscience.

Many of Durkheim’s ideas hold true today. Just recall a traumatic incident you may have experienced with other strangers (e.g., being stuck in an elevator during a power outage, weathering a serious storm, being involved in a traffic accident). Incidents such as this bring people together and permit a degree of bonding that would not take place in everyday life. Crime, Durkheim argued, serves a similar function.

How is all this relevant today? Most control theorists claim that individuals commit crime and deviant acts not because they are lacking in any way but because certain controls have been weakened in their development. This assumption is consistent not only with Durkheim’s theory but with a Freudian model of human behavior we discussed in Chapter 7.

FREUD’S CONCEPT OF THE ID AND SUPEREGO. Although psychoanalytic theory would seem to have few similarities with a sociological positivistic theory, in this case it is extremely complementary. One of Freud’s most essential propositions is that all individuals are born with a tendency toward inherent drives and selfishness due to the id domain of the psyche. According to Freud, not only are all people born with id drives; they all have an equal amount of such motivations toward selfishness. Another one of Freud’s assumptions is that this inherent, selfish tendency must be countered by controls produced from the development of the superego. According to Freud, the superego, which is the domain of the psyche that contains our conscience (see Figure 10.5), is formed through the interactions that occur between a young infant/child and significant others. As you can see, the control perspective has a long history that can be found in many philosophical and scientific disciplines.
Early Control Theories of Crime

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, criminologists borrowed and built on some of the ideas just discussed. Until that time, most research in the criminological literature was dominated by the learning theories discussed earlier in this chapter or by social structure theories, such as Merton’s strain theory or the Chicago School perspective (see Chapters 8 and 9, respectively). While early control theories may not be particularly popular in this day and age, they were vitally important because they laid the groundwork for future theoretical development.

**REISS’S CONTROL THEORY.** One of the first control theories of crime was proposed by Albert Reiss in 1951. Reiss claimed that delinquency was a consequence of weak controls that resulted in weak ego or superego controls among juvenile probationers.73 Reiss assumed that there was no explicit motivation for delinquent activity; rather, he claimed that it would occur in the absence of controls or restraints against such behavior.

Like Freud, Reiss believed that the family was the primary entity through which deviant predispositions were discouraged. Furthermore, Reiss claimed that a sound family environment would provide for an individual’s needs and the essential emotional bonds that are so important in socializing individuals. Another important factor in Reiss’s model was close supervision, not only by the family but also by the community. He claimed that individuals must be closely monitored for delinquent behavior and adequately disciplined when they break the rules.

Personal factors, such as the ability to restrain one’s impulses and delay gratification, were also important in Reiss’s framework. These concepts are similar to later, more modern concepts of control theory that have been consistently supported by empirical research.74 For this reason, Reiss was ahead of his time when he first proposed his control theory. Although the direct tests of Reiss’s theory have provided only partial support for it, Reiss’s influence is apparent in many contemporary criminological theories.75

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**Figure 10.5**

Freud’s Model of the Three Domains of the Psyche

- **Id**: Innate natural drives
- **Ego**: Regulates battles of id and superego
- **Superego**: Developed by early attachments
- **Psyche**: Determined by the battles of the id and superego, as regulated by the ego
TOBY’S CONCEPT OF STAKE IN CONFORMITY. Soon after Reiss’s theory was presented, a similar theory was developed. In 1957, Jackson Toby proposed a theory of delinquency and gangs. He claimed that individuals were more inclined to act on their natural tendencies when the controls on them were weak. Like most other control theorists, Toby claimed that such inclinations toward deviance were distributed equally across all individuals. Further, he emphasized the concept of a stake in conformity that supposedly prevents most people from committing crime. The stake in conformity Toby was referring to is the extent to which individuals are invested in conventional society. In other words, how much is a person willing to risk by violating the law?

Studies have shown that stake in conformity is one of the most influential factors in individuals’ decisions to offend. For example, individuals who have nothing to lose are much more likely to take risks and violate others’ rights than are those who have relatively more invested in social institutions.

One distinguishing feature of Toby’s theory is his emphasis on peer influences in terms of both motivating and inhibiting antisocial behavior, depending on whether most of one’s peers have low or high stakes in conformity. Toby’s stake in conformity has been used effectively in subsequent control theories of crime.

NYE’S CONTROL THEORY. A year after Toby introduced the stake in conformity, F. Ivan Nye (1958) proposed a relatively comprehensive control theory that placed a strong focus on the family. Following the assumptions of early control theorists, Nye claimed that no significant positive force causes delinquency, because such antisocial tendencies are universal and would be found in virtually everyone if not for certain controls usually found in the home.

Nye’s theory consists of three primary components of control. The first component is internal control, which is formed through social interaction. This socialization, he claimed, assists in the development of a conscience. Nye further claimed that if individuals are not given adequate resources and care, they will follow their natural tendencies toward doing what is necessary to protect their interests.

Nye’s second component of control is direct control, which consists of a wide range of constraints on individual propensities to commit deviant acts. Direct control includes numerous types of sanctions, such as jail and ridicule, and the restriction of one’s chances to commit criminal activity.

Nye’s third component of control is indirect control, which occurs when individuals are strongly attached to their early caregivers. For most children, it is through an intense and strong relationship with their parents or guardians that they establish an attachment to conventional society. However, Nye suggested that when the needs of an individual are not met by caregivers, inappropriate behavior can result.

As shown in Figure 10.6, Nye predicted a U-shaped curve of parental controls in predicting delinquency. Specifically, he argued that either no controls (i.e., complete freedom) or too much control (i.e., no freedom at all) would predict the most chronic delinquency. Instead,
he believed that a healthy balance of freedom and parental control was the best strategy for inhibiting criminal activity. Some recent research supports Nye's prediction. We will see later in this chapter that contemporary control theories, such as Tittle's control-balance theory, draw heavily on Nye's idea of having a healthy balance of controls and freedom.

**RECKLESS’S CONTAINMENT THEORY.** Another control theory, known as containment theory, has been proposed by Walter Reckless. This theory emphasizes both **inner containment** and **outer containment**, which can be viewed as internal and external controls. Reckless broke from traditional assumptions of social control theories by identifying predictive factors that **push and/or pull** individuals toward antisocial behavior. However, the focus of his theory remained on the controlling elements, which can be seen in the emphasis placed on “containment” in the theory’s name.

Reckless claimed that individuals can be **pushed** into delinquency by their social environment, such as by a lack of opportunities for education or employment. Furthermore, he pointed out that some individual factors, such as brain disorders or risk-taking personalities, could push some people to commit criminal behavior. Reckless also noted that some individuals could be **pulled** into criminal activity by hanging out with delinquent peers, watching too much violence on television, and so on. All told, Reckless went beyond the typical control theory assumption of inborn tendencies. In addition to these natural dispositions toward deviant behavior, containment theory proposes that extra pushes and pulls can motivate people to commit crime.

Reckless further claimed that the pushes and pulls toward criminal behavior could be enough to force individuals into criminal activity unless they are sufficiently **contained or controlled**. Reckless claimed that such containment should be both internal and external. **By inner containment**, he meant building a person’s sense of self. This would help the person resist the temptations of criminal activity. According to Reckless, other forms of inner containment include the ability of individuals to internalize societal norms. With respect to **outer containment**, Reckless claimed that social organizations, such as school, church, and other institutions, are essential in building bonds that inhibit individuals from being pushed or pulled into criminal activity.

**FIGURE 10.6** Nye’s Control Theory

![Nye’s Control Theory](image)

Reckless described a visual image of containment theory, which we present in Figure 10.7. The outer circle (Circle 1) in the figure represents the social realm of pressures and pulls, whereas the innermost circle (Circle 4) symbolizes a person’s individual-level pushes to commit crime. In between these two circles are the two layers of controls—namely, external containment (Circle 2) and internal containment (Circle 3). The structure of Figure 10.7 and the examples included in each circle are those specifically noted by Reckless.82

While some studies have shown more general support for containment theory, other studies have shown that some of the components of the theory, such as internalization of rules, seem to have much more support in accounting for variation in delinquency than do other factors, such as self-perception.83 In other words, external factors may be more important than internal ones. Furthermore, some studies have noted weaker support for Reckless’s theory among minorities and females. Thus, the model appears to be most valid for white males.84

One of the problems with containment theory is that it does not go far enough toward specifying the factors that are important in predicting criminality. For example, an infinite number of concepts exist that could potentially be categorized as either a “push” or “pull” toward criminality, or as an “inner” or “outer” containment of criminality. Thus, the theory could be considered too broad and not specific enough to be of practical value. To Reckless’s credit, though, containment theory has increased the exposure of control theories of criminal behavior. And although support for containment theory has been mixed, there is no doubt that it has influenced other, more recent control theories.85

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**FIGURE 10.7**

Reckless’s Containment Theory

Circle 1: Social Pressures and Pulls
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Economic insecurity
- Lack of opportunities
- Bad companions
- Mass media
- Inequalities
- Minority group status
- Group conflicts
- Delinquent subculture

Circle 2: External Containment
- Family
- Schools
- Organizations
- Church
- Role models
- Supportive relationships
- Ego bolstering
- Group reinforcement

Circle 3: Internal Containment
- Self-perception
- Retention of norms
- Goal orientation
- Frustration tolerance
- Internalization of rules

Circle 4: Organic and Psychological Push Factors
- Restlessness
- Discontent
- Hostility
- Inadequacy
- Inferiority

Modern Social Control Theories

As the previous sections attest, control theory has been around, in various forms, for some time. Modern social control theories, to which we now turn our attention, build on these earlier versions of social control but also add a level of depth and sophistication. Two modern social control theories that we consider here are Matza’s drift theory and Hirschi’s social bonding theory.

MATZA’S DRIFT THEORY. The theory of drift, presented by David Matza in 1964, claims that individuals offend at certain times in their lives when social controls, such as parental supervision, employment, and family ties, are weakened. In developing his theory, Matza criticized earlier theories and their tendency to predict too much crime. For example, theories such as those of the Chicago School would wrongfully predict that all individuals in bad neighborhoods will commit crime. Likewise, strain theory predicts that all poor individuals will commit crime. Obviously, this is not true. Thus, Matza claimed that there is a degree of determinism (i.e., Positive School) in human behavior but also a significant amount of free will (i.e., Classical School). He called this perspective soft determinism, which is the gray area between free will and determinism. This is illustrated in Table 10.2.

Returning to the basics of Matza’s theory, he claimed that individuals offend at times in life when social controls are weakened. As is well-known, the time when social controls are most weakened for the majority of individuals is during their teenage years. It is at this time that parents and other caretakers stop having a constant supervisory role. At the same time, teenagers generally do not have too many responsibilities—such as careers or children—that would inhibit them from experimenting with deviance. This is consistent with the well-known age–crime relationship; most individuals arrested are in their teenage years (see Figure 10.8). Once sufficient ties are developed, people tend to mature out of criminal lifestyles.

Matza further claimed that when supervision is absent and ties are minimal, the majority of individuals are the most “free” to do what they want. Where, then, does the term drift come from? As shown in Figure 10.8, it is during the times when people have few ties and obligations that they will “drift” in and out of delinquency. Matza pointed out that previous theories are unsuccessful in explaining this age–crime relationship. For example, he claimed that “most theories of delinquency take no account of maturational reform; those that do often do so at the expense of violating their own assumptions regarding the constrained delinquent.”

Matza insisted that “drifting” is not the same as a commitment to a life of crime. Instead, it is “experimenting” with questionable behavior and then rationalizing it. The way youth rationalize behavior that they know to be wrong is through the learning of techniques of neutralization, discussed earlier in this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSUMPTION OF COMPLETE FREE WILL</th>
<th>SOFT DETERMINISM</th>
<th>ASSUMPTION OF TOTAL (“HARD”) DETERMINISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief held by classical theorists</td>
<td>A sort of middle-ground position</td>
<td>Belief held by positive theorists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes all behavior is the result of decisions freely chosen by a person</td>
<td>Assumes all behavior is the result of factors (e.g., economy, upbringing, peers) determining behavior</td>
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soft determinism: the assumption that both determinism and free will play a role in offenders’ decisions to engage in criminal behavior.
Drift theory goes on to say that individuals do not reject the conventional normative structure. On the contrary, much offending is based on neutralizing or adhering to subterranean values that they have been socialized to use as a means of circumventing conventional values. This is basically the same as asserting one’s independence, which tends to occur with a vengeance during the teenage years.

As discussed in Chapter 8, subterranean values are quite prevalent and underlie many aspects of our culture. For example, while it is conventional to believe that violence is wrong, boxing and other injury-prone sports are some of the most popular spectator activities. Such phenomena create an atmosphere that readily allows neutralization or rationalization of criminal activity.

We will see other forms of subterranean values when we discuss risk-taking and low self-control later in this chapter. In many contexts (such as business), risk-taking and aggressiveness are seen as desirable characteristics; so many individuals are influenced by such subterranean values. This, according to Matza, adds to individuals’ likelihood of “drifting” into crime and delinquency.

Matza’s theory of drift seems sensible on its face, but empirical research examining the theory has been mixed. One of the primary criticisms of Matza’s theory, which even he acknowledged, is that it does not explain the most chronic offenders, the people responsible for the vast majority of serious, violent crimes. Chronic offenders often
offend long before and well past their teenage years, which clearly limits the predictive value of Matza’s theory.

Despite its shortcomings, Matza’s drift theory does appear to explain why many people offend exclusively during their teenage and young adult years but then grow out of it. Also, the theory is highly consistent with several of the ideas presented by control theorists, including the assumption that (1) selfish tendencies are universal, (2) these tendencies are inhibited by socialization and social controls, and (3) the selfish tendencies appear at times when controls are weakest. The theory goes beyond the previous control theories by adding the concepts of soft determinism, neutralization, and subterranean values, as well as the idea that in many contexts selfish and aggressive behaviors are not wrong but are actually desirable behaviors.

**HIRSCHI’S SOCIAL BONDING THEORY.** Perhaps the most influential social control theory was presented by Travis Hirschi in 1969.90 Hirschi’s theory of social bonding takes an assumption from Durkheim that “we are all animals, and thus naturally capable of committing criminal acts.”91 However, as Hirschi acknowledged, most humans can be adequately socialized to become tightly bonded to conventional entities, such as families, schools, communities, and the like. Hirschi claimed also that the stronger a person is bonded to conventional society, the less prone to engaging in crime he or she will be. More specifically, the stronger the social bond, the less likely that an individual will commit criminal offenses.

As shown in Figure 10.9, Hirschi’s social bond is made up of four elements: (1) attachment, (2) commitment, (3) involvement, and (4) beliefs. The “stronger” or more developed a person is in each of the four elements, the less likely he or she will be to commit crime. Let us now consider each element in detail.

The most important factor in the social bond is attachment, which consists of affectionate bonds between an individual and his or her significant others. Attachment is
vitaly important for the internalization of conventional values. Hirschi claimed that “the essence of internalization of norms, conscience, or superego thus lies in the attachment of the individual to others.” Hirschi made it clear, as did Freud, that strong early attachments are the most important factor in developing a social bond. Commitment, involvement, and belief, he argued, are contingent on adequate attachment to others. That is, without healthy attachments, especially early in life, the probability of acting inappropriately increases.

Commitment, the second element of Hirschi’s social bond, is the investment a person has in conventional society. This has been explained as one’s “stake in conformity,” or what is at risk of being lost if one gets caught committing crime. If a person feels that much will be lost by committing crime, then he or she will probably not do so. In contrast, if someone has nothing to lose, what is to prevent that person from doing something he or she may be punished for? The answer is, of course, not much. And this, some theorists claim, is why it is difficult to control so-called “chronic offenders” who have nothing to lose. Trying to instill a “commitment” to conventional society in such individuals is extremely difficult.

Another element of the social bond is involvement, which is the time spent in conventional activities. The assumption is that time spent in constructive activities will reduce time devoted to illegal behaviors. This element of the bond goes back to the old adage that “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” Hirschi claimed that taking an active role in all forms of conventional activities can inhibit delinquent and criminal activity.

The last element of the social bond is beliefs, which have generally been interpreted as moral beliefs concerning the laws and rules of society. This is one of the most examined, and consistently supported, aspects of the social bond. Basically, individuals who feel that a course of action is against their moral beliefs are much less likely to pursue it than are individuals who don’t see a breach of morality in such behavior. For example, we all probably know some people who see drunk driving as a serious offense because of the injury and death it can cause. However, we also probably know individuals who don’t see a problem with such behavior. The same can be said about speeding in a car, shoplifting from a store, or using marijuana; people differ in their beliefs about most forms of criminal activity.

Hirschi’s theory has been tested by numerous researchers and has, for the most part, been supported. However, one criticism is that the components of the social bond may predict criminality only if they are defined in a certain way. For example, with respect to the “involvement” element of the bond, studies have shown that not all conventional activities are equal when it comes to preventing delinquency. Only academic or religious activities seem to have consistent effects on inhibiting delinquency. In contrast, many studies show that teenagers who date or play sports actually have an increased risk of committing crime.

Another major criticism of Hirschi’s theory is that the effects of “attachments” on crime depend on whom one is attached to. As explained earlier in this chapter, studies have clearly and consistently shown that attachment to delinquent peers is a strong predictor of criminal activity.
Finally, some evidence indicates that social bonding theory may better explain reasons why individuals start offending but not reasons why people continue or escalate in their offending. One reason for this is that Hirschi’s theory does not elaborate on what occurs after an individual commits criminal activity. This is likely the primary reason why some of the more complex integrated theories of crime (some of which are discussed below) often attribute the initiation of delinquency to a breakdown in the social bond. However, they typically see other theories (such as differential reinforcement) as better predictors of what happens after the initial stages of the criminal career.96

Despite the criticism it has received, Hirschi’s social bonding theory is still one of the most accepted theories of criminal behavior.97 It is a relatively convincing explanation for criminality because of the consistent support it has found among samples of people taken from all over the world.98

**Integrated Social Control Theories**

It is worthwhile to briefly discuss the two integrated models that most incorporate the control perspective into their frameworks. These two integrated models are control-balance theory and power-control theory. Both have received considerable attention in the criminological literature.

**TITTLE’S CONTROL-BALANCE THEORY.** Presented by Charles Tittle in 1995, control-balance theory proposes that (1) the amount of control to which one is subjected and (2) the amount of control one can exercise determine the probability of deviance occurring. The “balance” between these two types of control, he argued, can even predict the type of behavior likely to be committed.99

Tittle argued that a person is least likely to offend when he or she has a balance of controlling and being controlled. Further, the likelihood of offending will increase when these factors become imbalanced. If individuals are more controlled (Tittle calls this control deficit), then the theory predicts that they will commit predatory or defiant acts. In contrast, if an individual possesses an excessive level of control (Tittle calls this control surplus), then he or she will be more likely to commit acts of exploitation or decadence. Note that excessive control is not the same as excessive self-control. Tittle argues that people who are controlling—that is, who have excessive control over others—will be predisposed toward inappropriate activities.

Initial empirical tests of control-balance theory have reported mixed results, with both surpluses and deficits predicting the same types of deviance.100 Additionally, researchers have uncovered differing effects of the control-balance ratio on two types of deviance that are contingent on gender. This finding is consistent with the gender-specific support found for Reckless’s containment theory, described earlier in this chapter.101

**HAGAN’S POWER-CONTROL THEORY.** Power-control theory is another integrated theory, proposed by John Hagan and his colleagues.102 The primary focus of this theory is on the level of patriarchal attitudes and structure in the household, which are influenced by parental positions in the workforce. Power-control theory assumes that in households where the mother and father have relatively similar levels of power at work (i.e., balanced households), mothers will be less likely to exert control over their daughters. These balanced households will be less likely to experience gender differences in the criminal offending of the children. However, households in which mothers and fathers have dissimilar levels of power in the workplace (i.e., unbalanced households) are more likely to suppress criminal activity in daughters. Additionally, assertiveness and risky activity among the males in the house will be encouraged. This assertiveness and risky activity may be a precursor to crime.
Most empirical tests of power-control have provided moderate support for the theory, while more recent studies have further specified the validity of the theory in different contexts. For example, one recent study reported that the influence of mothers, not fathers, on sons had the greatest impact on reducing the delinquency of young males. Another researcher has found that differences in perceived threats of embarrassment and formal sanctions varied between more patriarchal and less patriarchal households. Finally, studies have also started measuring the effect of patriarchal attitudes on crime and delinquency.

Power-control theory is a good example of a social control theory in that it is consistent with the idea that individuals must be socialized and that the gender differences in such socialization affect how people will act throughout life.

We will revisit this theory again in Chapter 12.

A General Theory of Crime: Low Self-Control

In 1990, Hirschi, along with his colleague Michael Gottfredson, proposed a general theory of low self-control, which is often referred to as the general theory of crime. This theory has led to a significant amount of debate and research in the field since its appearance, more so than any other contemporary theory of crime. Like the previous control theories of crime, this theory assumes that individuals are born predisposed toward selfish, self-centered activities and that only effective child rearing and socialization can create self-control among persons. As shown in Figure 10.10, without such adequate socialization (i.e., social controls) and reduction of criminal opportunities, individuals will follow their natural tendencies to become selfish predators. Furthermore, the general theory of crime assumes that self-control must be established by age 10. If it has not formed by that time, according to the theory, individuals will forever exhibit low self-control.

Although Gottfredson and Hirschi still attribute the formation of controls to the socialization process, the distinguishing characteristic of this theory is its emphasis on the individual’s ability to control himself or herself. That is, the general theory of crime assumes that people can take a degree of control over their own decisions and, within certain limitations, “control” themselves.

The general theory of crime is accepted as one of the most valid theories of crime. This is probably because it identifies only one primary factor that causes criminality—low self-control. But low self-control may actually consist of a series of personality traits, including risk taking, impulsiveness, self-centeredness, short-term orientation, and quick temper. For example, recent research has supported the idea that inadequate child-rearing practices tend to result in lower levels of self-control among children and that these low levels produce various risky behaviors, including criminal activity.

Psychological Aspects of Low Self-Control

Criminologists have recently claimed that low self-control may be due to the emotional disposition of individuals. For example, one study showed that the effects of
low self-control on intentions to commit drunk driving and shoplifting were tied to individuals’ perceptions of pleasure and shame. More specifically, the findings of this study showed that individuals who had low self-control had significantly lower levels of anticipated shame but significantly higher levels of perceived pleasure in committing both drunk driving and shoplifting. These results suggest that individuals who lack self-control will be oriented toward gaining pleasure and taking advantage of resources but also toward avoiding negative emotional feelings (e.g., shame) that are primarily induced through socialization.

**Physiological Aspects of Low Self-Control**

Low self-control can also be tied to physiological factors. Interestingly, research has shown that chronic offenders show greater arousal toward danger and risk taking than toward the possibility of punishment. This arousal has been measured by monitoring brain activity in response to certain stimuli. The research suggests that individuals are encouraged to commit risky behavior due to physiological mechanisms that reward their risk-taking activities by releasing “pleasure” chemicals in the brain.

In a similar vein, recent studies show that chronic gamblers tend to get a physiological “high” (a sudden, intense release of brain chemicals similar to that following a small dose of cocaine) from the activity of betting, particularly when they are gambling with their own money and risking a personal loss. Undoubtedly, there exists a minority

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**Figure 10.10** Gottfredson and Hirschi’s Theory of Low Self-Control

- **Bad Child-Rearing**
  - Inconsistent discipline
  - Neglect/lack of supervision
  - Physical abuse
  - Providing bad models of behavior
  - Emotional/mental abuse

- **Low Self-Control** (identifiable before age 10)
  - Self-centeredness
  - Short-term orientation
  - Failure to consider future consequences of actions
  - Avoidance of difficult tasks and hard work
  - Short temper/impulsive
  - Risk taking
  - Gives in readily when opportunities for crime arise

- **Criminal offending and all forms of deviant behavior**

- **Assumes all individuals are born lacking self-control and are selfish**

- **Good Child-Rearing**
  - Fair and consistent discipline
  - Consistent monitoring
  - Emotional support
  - Building responsibility and accountability
  - Good role models

- **High Self-Control** (must be established by age 10)
  - Ability to work hard and delay gratification
  - Inhibited by potential consequences of actions
  - Long-term orientation
  - Not as tempted by opportunities to commit crime

- **Able to resist temptations to commit crime and other forms of deviance**
group of individuals who thrive off of risk-taking behaviors significantly more than others do. This suggests that there are not just psychological differences among people but also physiological differences that may explain why certain individuals favor risky behaviors.

Researchers have also found that criminal offenders generally perceive a significantly lower level of internal sanctions (e.g., shame, guilt, embarrassment) than do nonoffenders. So, in summary, a select group of individuals appear to derive physiological and psychological pleasure from engaging in risky behaviors while simultaneously being less likely to be inhibited by internal emotional sanctions. Such a combination, Gottfredson and Hirschi claimed, is dangerous and helps explain why some impulsive individuals often end up in prison.

Finally, the psychological and physiological aspects of low self-control may help explain the gender differences observed between males and females. Specifically, studies show that females are significantly more likely than males to experience internal emotional sanctioning for offenses they have committed. In other words, there appears to be something innately different about males and females that helps explain the differing levels of self-control each possesses.

Control perspectives are among the oldest and most respected explanations of criminal activity. The fundamental assumption that humans have an inborn, selfish disposition that must be controlled through socialization distinguishes control theories from other theories of crime. The ability of the control perspective to remain among the most popular criminological theories demonstrates its legitimacy as an explanation of behavior. This is likely due to the dedication and efforts of criminologists who are constantly developing new and improved versions of control theory, many of which we have discussed here.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Learning theories, such as differential association, focus on the influence of role models and significant others on individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Thus, one needs to emphasize positive, or prosocial, role models and avoid negative, or antisocial, role models. For example, a standard condition of an individual's probation or parole is that he or she not associate with any known felons:

**Associates:** You shall not associate with individuals who have criminal records or other individuals as deemed inappropriate by the Division. You shall not have any contact with persons confined in a correctional institution unless specific written permission has been granted by your supervising officer and the correctional institution.
Jesse Pomeroy was born on November 29, 1859, in Charlestown, Massachusetts. His father, Thomas, was a violent alcoholic. He would often go on drinking binges and then proceed to beat his two sons, Charles and Jesse. Jesse’s mother, Ruth Ann, eventually divorced Thomas in the 1870s; divorce was extremely uncommon during this time. In fact, Ruth Ann revealed that she divorced her husband after one of these brutal beatings:

Jesse later admitted to his doctors that his father had made him go to his room and strip totally naked, whereupon Thomas had proceeded to lash out with a leather belt... Jesse realized the beatings... were not that bad, not nearly as horrific as the relentless pummeling he had received almost four years earlier, when his father had taken Jesse, just eight years old, to an abandoned shed in the woods. There Thomas had become so enraged that the blows from a horsewhip had nearly killed his son.116

Ruth Ann realized that Jesse was a strong-willed boy. Jesse was often made fun of at school, primarily because of a deformity in his right eye. Jesse’s teacher complained of his problem behavior at school. The teacher noted that he was a loner; he preferred to read cheap “dime novels.” During this time, these novels were full of violence, sex, battles, and mayhem. Eventually, Ruth Ann was asked to remove her son from school.

Jesse’s problems were not restricted to just school. His mother brought home two yellow canaries; she would come home looking forward to their chirping in the wooden cage. One afternoon, she came home to find the two canaries dead—their necks were twisted off their bodies. Prior to this, a neighbor had told Ruth Ann that her little kitten had gone missing. A few days later, Ruth Ann watched Jesse walking down a nearby street with the dead kitten in one hand and a kitchen knife in the other. In 1871, there were reports that children in the next city over, Chelsea, were being beaten by an older boy. Some of these children were sexually assaulted. The victims reported that this boy would offer them money and treats; then he would suggest they go to a remote locate. There he would abuse the children.117 The newspapers referred to him as “The Boy Torturer” and “The Red Devil.” After reading a description of this boy in the Boston Globe, Ruth Ann recognized this was her son; she moved her family to South Boston. In August of 1872, a young boy was found tortured in South Boston; a month later, a child was found beaten, assaulted, and tied up to a telephone pole. This victim, however, was able to give a very detailed description. This resulted in Jesse Pomeroy being arrested and sentenced to the State Reform School at Westborough for the remainder of his minor-status years (e.g., six years). Ruth Ann, however, diligently worked to have her son released earlier; Jesse was released months after.118

In March 1874, nine-year-old Katie Curran disappeared. During the investigation, it was revealed that the last place she had been seen was at the Pomeroy’s shop; Jesse was interrogated, but there was no arrest at that time. In April, the body of four-year-old Horace Millen was found on the beach of Dorchester Bay. His throat had been cut and he had been stabbed 15 times; also, one of his eyes had been torn out. The police recalled the beatings of the other children two years earlier and arrested Jesse Pomeroy; he was 14 years old at the time. In July 1874, Jesse confessed to Horace Millen’s murder. Jesse Pomeroy also confessed to the murder of Katie Curran. He had lured her into the basement of his mother’s dress shop. He had then cut her throat and buried her body under an ash heap. When he was asked why he committed the murders, he stated, “I couldn’t help it.”119 On September 7, 1876, Jesse Pomeroy was sentenced to death. Subsequently, his sentence was commuted to life in prison—solitary confinement. In 1916, he was released from solitary confinement and was allowed to mix with other prisoners at the Charlestown Prison. On September 29, 1932, he died at the age of 73 years.120

THINK ABOUT IT:

So why did he do it? As described by the theories presented in this chapter, specifically various social control...
Programs such as Head Start attempt to provide youths with more positive or favorable definitions of conventional behavior. Various school districts are incorporating conflict resolution programs into their curricula. Tremblay and Craig maintained that the developmental prevention approach is primarily founded on the premise that criminal activity is influenced by behavioral and attitudinal patterns that are learned during an individual’s development. In their review of various preventive interventions, however, they stated,

It does appear that money invested in early (e.g., preschool) prevention efforts with at-risk families will give greater pay-offs than money invested in later (e.g., adolescence) prevention efforts with the same at-risk families. This general rule is not easy to apply, because juvenile delinquents attract much more public attention than high risk infants or toddlers.

In reference to social control theories, policies focus on enhancing more crime and delinquency control measures. These types of efforts are often popular from the public perspective. In a similar vein, programs have been developed that attempt to engage youths in more conventional-type activities. Thus, programs such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H clubs, and Little League baseball are examples of such programming.
CONCLUSION

In the first section, we discussed learning theories. These theories focus on the process of how and why individuals learn criminal behavior, including the techniques, justifications, and underlying values. These theories also give substantial attention to significant people involved in the socialization process—specifically, family, friends, and important others. Learning theories continue to be helpful in our understanding of criminal behavior, as shown by virtually all empirical studies that have evaluated the validity of these theoretical models. If we theorize that individuals learn various techniques, justifications, and values that influence their potential to engage in criminal activity, then these individuals can also learn how to engage in law-abiding behavior.

In the latter half of this chapter, we examined a large number of control theories, which assume that individuals are essentially born naturally greedy and selfish and that we have to be controlled to resist acting on these inherent drives. Although the many different control theories have some unique distinctions, they all share one key underlying assumption: They all assume that people must be socialized in such a way that their learning of right and wrong will control the antisocial tendencies they are born with.

In this chapter, we discussed a wide range of theories that may appear to be quite different. However, it is important to remember that all the criminological theories covered in this chapter share an emphasis on social processes as the primary reason why individuals commit crime. This is true for the learning theories, which propose that people are taught to commit crime, as well as for the control theories, which claim that people offend naturally and must be taught not to commit crime. Despite their seemingly opposite assumptions of human behavior, the fact is that learning and control theories both identify socialization, or the lack thereof, as the key cause of criminal behavior.

### SUMMARY OF THEORIES IN CHAPTER 10

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<th>KEY PROPOSTIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Differential association</td>
<td>Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons; learning occurs within intimate personal groups; learned definitions are favorable or unfavorable to the legal code; associations vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.</td>
<td>Edwin Sutherland</td>
<td>Criminality is learned just like any conventional activity; any normal individual, when exposed to definitions and attitudes favorable toward crime, will learn both the motivations and techniques for engaging in illegal behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differential reinforcement theory</td>
<td>Criminal behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning and modeling/imitation; criminal behavior is learned in both nonsocial and social interactions; learning occurs in groups that make up the individual’s major source of reinforcements.</td>
<td>Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers</td>
<td>Assumes individuals are born with a blank slate and socialized and taught how to behave through classical and operant conditioning as well as modeling; behavior occurs and continues depending on past and present rewards and punishments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques of neutralization</td>
<td>Criminals are still partially committed to the dominant social order; there are five techniques of neutralization to justify criminal behavior.</td>
<td>Gresham Sykes and David Matza</td>
<td>Individuals can engage in criminal behavior and avoid feelings of guilt for these actions by justifying or rationalizing their behavior; since they are partially committed to the social order, such justifications help them engage in criminal behavior without serious damage to their self-image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early control theories</td>
<td>Individuals are naturally born selfish and greedy, and they must be socialized by others to control their inherent desires and drives.</td>
<td>Sigmund Freud, Jackson Toby, Albert Reiss, F. Ivan Nye, Walter Reckless, and others</td>
<td>Most of the early theorists emphasized the need for external societal controls to counter people’s inner drives; Reckless called such a process “containment,” in the sense that if such drives are not contained, there is little to stop a person from doing what is natural, which is to offend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of drift</td>
<td>Soft determinism, meaning that offending behavior is the result of both free will/decision-making and deterministic factors outside our control.</td>
<td>David Matza</td>
<td>Offending typically peaks in the teenage years because that is the time when social controls are weakest; that is, we are no longer being monitored constantly by caretakers, and the adulthood control factors of marriage, employment, etc., have not yet kicked in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bonding theory</td>
<td>The social bond is made up of four elements: attachments, commitment, involvement, and moral beliefs.</td>
<td>Travis Hirschi</td>
<td>A simple theory in the sense that as each of the four elements of the social bond grows stronger, the likelihood of offending lessens due to the individual’s being more bonded to conventional society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control-balance theory</td>
<td>Control deficit and control surplus</td>
<td>Charles Tittle</td>
<td>Individuals who either are too controlled by others or have too much control over others are more likely to commit crimes, compared with people who have a healthy balance between the two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-control theory</td>
<td>Balanced and unbalanced households</td>
<td>John Hagan</td>
<td>Households in which the parents have similar types of jobs are more balanced and tend to control their sons and daughters more equally than in unbalanced households, where the parents have different jobs, which leads to more controls placed on daughters than on sons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-control theory</td>
<td>Bad child rearing</td>
<td>Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi</td>
<td>Bad parenting (abusive, inconsistent, lack of monitoring, neglectful) results in lack of development of self-control, which then leads to criminality and risky behaviors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**KEY TERMS**

- classical conditioning, 255
- collective conscience, 272
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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What distinguishes learning theories from other criminological theories?
2. What distinguishes differential association from differential reinforcement theory?
3. What did differential identification add to learning theories?
4. Which technique of neutralization do you use/relate to the most? Why?
5. Which technique of neutralization do you find least valid? Why?
6. Which element of Hirschi’s social bond do you find you have the highest levels of?
7. Which element of Hirschi’s social bond do you find you have the lowest levels of?
8. Can you identify someone you know who fits the profile of a person with low self-control?
9. Which aspects of the low self-control personality do you think you fit?
10. Regarding Matza’s theory of drift, do you think this relates to when you or your friends have committed crimes in your lives? Why or why not?

**WEB RESOURCES**

**Social Learning Theories**

- http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/sociallearning.htm

**Control Theories**

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwrd8R5_OGs

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FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AND APPLICATION, VISIT THE STUDENT STUDY SITE:

- Selling Kids on Veggies when Rules Like ‘Clean Your Plate’ Fail
- To End the Cycle of Crime, Italian Judge Breaks Up Big-Time Mafia Families
- Preventing Juvenile Detention With a Blank Canvas and a Can of Spray Paint
- An examination of differential association and social control theory: Family systems and delinquency
- Techniques of neutralization and persistent sexual abuse by clergy: A content analysis of priest personnel files from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee
- A partial test of Agnew’s general theory of crime and delinquency
- Francis Weaver, Son Of Notorious Child Killer Ward Weaver III, Charged In Homicide
- Children, Violence, and Trauma—A Call to Action
- One of the Most Dangerous Schools in America-ABC World News Tonight-ABC News
- Hidden Camera Experiment: Young Kids Drawn to Guns-ABC World News- ABC News
- The Difference Between Classical and Operant Conditioning- Peggy Andover
- Bandura’s Bobo Doll Experiment
- Aileen Wuornos
- Parents Take Guns to Schools
- Victim Fights Back
- Predictive Policing

PREMIUM VIDEO:
Check out the Interactive eBook for premium videos, including videos from author Stephen Tibbetts, who discusses real-world examples and strange crimes; and videos from former offenders, who share their stories from a first-person view, and touch on key theories and concepts from the chapter.