

Social process and learning theories of crime



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classical conditioning A learning model that assumes that animals, as well as people, learn through associations between stimuli and responses; this model was primarily promoted by Pavlov.

containment theory A control theory proposed by Reckless in the 1960s, which presented a model that emphasized internal and social pressures to commit crime, which range from personality predispositions to peer influences, as well as internal and external constraints, ranging from personal self-control to parental control, that determine whether an individual will engage in criminal activity. This theory is often criticized as being too vague or general, but it advanced criminological theory by providing a framework in which many internal and external factors were emphasized.

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control = balance theory An integrated theory originally presented by Gresham Sykes and David Matza, which assumes that the amount of control to which one is subjected, as compared to the amount of control that one can exercise, determines the probability of deviant behavior and the types of deviance that are committed by that individual. In other words, the balance or imbalance between these two types of control can predict the amount and type of behavior likely to be committed.

control theories A group of theories of criminal behavior that emphasize the assumption that humans are born selfish and have tendencies to be aggressive and offend and that individuals must be controlled, typically by socialization and discipline, or from internalized self-control that has been developed in their upbringing.

differential association theory A theory of criminal behavior that emphasizes that association with significant others (peers, parents, etc.) in learning criminal behavior. This theory was originally presented by Sutherland.

differential identification

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theoryA theory of criminal behavior that is very similar to differential association theory; the major difference is that differential identification theory takes into account associations with persons/images that are presented in the media (e. g., movies, TV, sports, etc.). This model was originally proposed by Glaser.

differential reinforcement theoryA theory of criminal behavior that emphasizes various types of social learning, specifically classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and imitation/modeling. This theory was originally presented by Burgess and Akers and is one of the most supported theories according to empirical studies.

drift theoryA theory of criminal behavior in which the lack of social controls in the teenage years allows for individuals to experiment in various criminal offending, often due to peer influence, without the individuals buying into a criminal lifestyle; this theory was introduced by David Matza.

egoThe only conscious domain of the psyche; according to Freud it functions to mediate the battle between id and superego.

idA subconscious domain of the psyche, according to Freud, with which we are all born; it is responsible for our innate desires and drives (such as libido [sex drive]); it battles that moral conscience of the superego.

learning theoriesTheoretical models that assume criminal behaviors of individuals is due to a process of learning from others the motivations and techniques for engaging in such behavior. Virtually all of the variations of the learning perspective propose that the processes involved in a person learning how and why to commit crimes are the same as those involved in learning to engage in conventional activities (e. g., riding a bike, playing basketball).

modeling and imitationA major factor in differential reinforcement theory, which proposes that much social learning takes place via imitation or modeling or behavior; for example,

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when adults/parents say "bad" words, their children begin using those words.

negative punishmentA concept in social learning in which people are given a punishment by removing something that they enjoy/like (e. g., taking away driving privileges for a teenager).

negative reinforcementA concept in social learning in which people are given a reward by removing something that they dislike (e. g., not being on a curfew or not having to do their "chores").

neutralization theoryA theory of criminal behavior that emphasizes the excuses or neutralization techniques that are used by offenders to alleviate the guilt (or to excuse) their behavior, when they know that their behavior is immoral; this theory was originally presented by Gresham Sykes and David Matza. In their theory, they presented five key "techniques," ways that offenders alleviate their guilt or excuse their behavior, which they know is wrong; since they presented this idea in the 1960s, other techniques have been added, especially regarding white-collar crime.

operant conditioningThe learning model that takes place in organisms (such as humans), based on association between an action and feedback that occurs after it has taken place; for example, a rat running a maze can be trained to run the maze faster based on rewards (reinforcement), such as cheese, as well as punishments, such as electric shocks; introduced and promoted by B. F. Skinner.

positive punishmentA concept in social learning in which an individual is given a punishment by doing something they dislike (e. g., spanking, time-out, grounding, etc.).

positive reinforcementA concept in social learning in which an individual is given a reward by providing something they like (e. g., money, extending curfew, etc.).

power-control theoryAn integrated theory of crime that assumes that in households where the mother and father have relatively similar levels of power at work (i. e.,

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balanced households), mothers will be less likely to exert control on 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, but more criminal activity is likely in the boys of the household.

social bonding theory A control theory proposed by Hirschi in 1969 which assumes that individuals are predisposed to commit crime and that the conventional bond that is formed with the individual prevents or reduces their offending. This bond is made up of four constructs: attachments, commitment, involvement, and moral beliefs regarding committing crime.

soft determinism The assumption that both determinism (the fundamental assumption of the Positive School of criminology) and free will/free choice (the fundamental assumption of the Classical School) play a role in offenders' decisions to engage in criminal behavior. This perspective can be seen as a type of compromise or "middle-road" concept.

stake in conformity A significant portion of Toby's control theory, which applies to virtually all control theories, which refers to the extent to which individuals have investments in conventional society. It is believed, and supported by empirical studies, that the higher the stake in conformity an individual has, the less likely he or she will engage in criminal offending.

subterranean values Those norms that individuals have been socialized to accept (e. g., violence) in certain contexts in a given society; an example would be the popularity of boxing or Ultimate Fighting Championship events in American society, even though violence is generally viewed negatively. Another example is the romanticized nature and popularity of crime movies, such as

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The Godfather and Pulp FictionsuperegoA subconscious domain of the psyche, according to Freud; it is not part of our nature but must be developed through early social attachments; it is responsible for our morality and conscience; it battles the subconscious drives of the id. tabula rasaThe assumption that when people are born, they have a "blank slate" regarding morality and that every portion of their ethical/moral beliefs is determined by the interactions that occur in the way they are raised and socialized. This is a key assumption of virtually all learning theories. theory of low self-controlA theory that proposes that individuals either develop self-control by the time they are about age 10 or do not. Those who do not develop self-control will manifest criminal/deviant behaviors throughout life. This perspective was originally proposed by Gottfredson and Hirschi.