

Example of social learning theory of crime argumentative essay

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



The social learning theory argues that crime is learned just like any other thing. Crime is learnt from things people see, experience and from people one associates with. This theory is applied to many types of crimes and criminals. Akers reworked Sutherland's differential theory by including the reinforcement idea. It is a common theory of criminality, crime and deviant behaviors. It is a theory that is frequently applied on crime and deviant behaviors. It explains why people commit crimes and ways that can be used to stop them from committing the crimes. This theory comprises of four fundamental concepts, differential association, imitation, definition and reinforcement. The main idea about this theory is that people learn criminal behavior through interaction with other people. Studying in the same environment and interacting with people from different social grounds brings both conforming and deviant behaviors. People learn within a social environment. They do what they observe others do.

This theory was influenced by crime control, political, historical and changing cultural factors. According to the social learning theory, people engage in crime through association with people with criminal behaviors, through interaction, they are exposed to criminal models (Akers 1994). A child can learn smoking by watching the parent smoke. Furthermore a child can grow up through domestic violence and end up having an abusive behavior in marriage; this is as a result of what he/she saw the parents do.

The social learning theory has both strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths of the social learning theory of crime is that it is used to correct behaviors. For example in a classroom, there can be two types of students, a behaving student and a misbehaving student. The teacher will sit the two

together in order to make the misbehaving child imitate what the behaving child does and change. Through imitating what they observe the other student does, the misbehaving student can change and become a well behaving student. Conversely, the behaving student might start misbehaving after observing what the misbehaving child does.

The social learning theory is a well recognized and established theory on criminal and deviant behaviors. Another strength of this theory is that it is used in prisons, schools, counseling centers and substance abuse treatment centers and it makes people change their deviant behaviors (Akers 1994). In addition, this theory is used in many correctional facilities to reinforce law abiding and positive behaviors. Inmates and probationers learn new behaviors through reinforcement, punishment and also through observing. The social learning theory of crime helps to instill discipline and good behaviors in criminals.

One weakness of the social learning theory and crime is that it only focuses on interactions between social groups and individuals but it fails to take into account the individual differences. Biological and psychological individual differences can affect a person's interaction with other people. Another weakness is that this theory ignores the role of opportunity in criminal behaviors. The theory focuses only on how people learn deviant behaviors through interaction with others with such behaviors but it fails to explain how a person comes into contact with this people with criminal behaviors yet they can avoid it. In addition, people can still become criminals even without interacting with individuals with criminal behaviors and this theory does not explain how this happens. Some criminals just find themselves with criminal

behaviors without learning them from a third party. This theory does not give a clear explanation of the origin of deviant behaviors like adolescent smoking. Some adolescents find themselves smoking without learning from their friends. Moreover, it is argued that Aker did not expand the differential association and the theory is only based on psychological theories of learning.

In essence, the social learning theory is a reworking of Sutherlands differential theory whereby the reinforcement idea is included by Akers. This theory is mainly applied on behaviors within groups that receive reinforcement like social groups, peer groups, gangs and even family. Associating with people with deviant behaviors contributes to learning and acceptance of this behavior. Behaviors are learnt and later reinforced.

Reference

Akers, R., L. (1994). A social Learning Theory of Crime. Los Angeles: Roxbury publishing Company.