

Sutherland, theory of differential association nine principles



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Criminal behaviour is learned. Sutherland believed that criminal behavior was not inherited or a result of any other biological condition. In other words, the individual, without prior influence from others, is incapable of inventing criminal behaviour. The behaviour is learned in interaction with other people in the process of communication. Sutherland believed that such communication usually involves verbal interaction, however it could also involve the use of gestures without words. This point supports the first by claiming individuals cannot become a criminal themselves.

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The principal part of the learning of criminal behaviour occurs within intimate personal groups. Intimate personal groups provided the largest influence on the learning of criminal behaviour. He felt that impersonal agencies of communication such as newspapers and films played a relatively unimportant role in the 'birth' of criminal behaviour.

When criminal behaviour is learned, the learning includes the techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple and the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalisations and attitudes. A criminal has to learn the techniques of the trade from someone; he also learns the attitudes taken and excuses made for behaving in a criminal fashion. The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favourable or unfavourable. Groups of people may see certain laws as pointless or discriminatory and therefore feel they can flaunt them or that it is right to break them. e.g. underage drinking. A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favourable to violation of law over definitions unfavourable to violation of law.

Principle of differential association - Individuals become

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criminal due to repeated contacts with criminal activity and a lack of contact with non-criminal activity. Differential associations (number of contacts with criminals over non-criminals) may vary in frequency, duration, priority and intensity. A precise description of a persons criminal behaviour would be possible in quantitative form by analyzing the number of contact with criminals which would lead to a mathematical ratio being reached.

Unfortunately, as he pointed out, an appropriate formula had yet to be developed due to the sheer difficulty involved. The process of learning criminal behaviour by association with criminal and anti criminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning.

Sutherland claims that criminal behaviour is learned just like every other behaviour. In other words, he felt there was nothing special or abnormal about criminal behaviour, or criminals for that matter -- going against the claims of biological and pathological theorists. Criminal behaviour is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values, since non-criminal behaviour is an expression of the same needs and values. A thief generally steals in order to obtain money. However, such an action is no different from the work of an honest labourer, so this need in itself cannot explain theft.