

## Differential Association

- Social Process/Interaction Theories
- Describe and explain the ways in which individuals become criminals through interactions with others, their motivations, perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, identity, etc.
- Social Process/Interaction Theories
- Deviant behavior is learned in much the same way that conforming behavior is learned.
- The content and directions of learning differ as individuals respond to the varying pressures and constraints of their environment.
- Edwin H. Sutherland (1883-1950)
- Born in Nebraska; grad school at University of Chicago.
- One of the country's leading criminologists
- Many influential articles and books including *Twenty Thousand Homeless Men* (1936), *The Professional Thief* (1937), and *Principles of Criminology, Third Edition* (1939).
- Edwin H. Sutherland (1883-1950)
- Relied on work of Shaw and McKay as well as personal interviews with Chic Conwell, a professional thief.
- Last major book, *White Collar Crime*, analyzed crimes committed by American corporations and executives. Pointed out the biases inherent in statistics such as the UCR that lacked data on WCC.
- He believed that "conventional generalizations about crime and criminality are invalid because they explain only the crimes of the lower class, at most." (Sutherland, 1949: x).
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- Differential Association Theory
- First and most prominent formal statement of micro-level learning theory.
- Introduced in 1939 in third edition of *Principles of Criminology* textbook (final version in 1947)
- Differential Association Theory
- Response to Chicago school (social disorganization and anomie); challenged ideas of the time by stating that: "Deviant behavior is a normal expression of the social organization of subcultures within "deviant areas"
- Remains one of the most dominant theories of crime.
- Nine propositions: Sixth is the "principle of differential association".
- *The Theory*

- People acquire criminal behavior patterns through the same process by which they acquire conventional behavior patterns.
- *The Theory*
- Through association with others, individuals learn values, norms, motivations, rationalizations, techniques, and definitions that may either be favorable or unfavorable to violation of the law.
- *The Theory*
- Individuals learn criminal behavior and are more likely to engage in criminal activity when the opportunity presents itself if they have been exposed to criminal definitions for a longer period of time, with more intensity and more frequently than they have been exposed to anti-criminal definitions.
- *The Theory*
- Criminal behavior is not the result of biological or psychological pathology but is one possible outcome of normal interactive processes.
- *Criticisms*
- Very abstract and difficult to empirically test as a whole.
- "Definitions" never precisely defined. How do you measure definitions favorable or unfavorable to crime? They cannot be observed or measured.
- *Criticisms*
- Learning process is never fully explained.
- Leaves out personality and psychological variables
- *Criticisms*
- Doesn't include media effects (introduced before media became prevalent).
- Doesn't explain the fact that people often respond differently to the same situation.
- *Criticisms*
- What accounts for the first criminal act?
- How does one explain crimes that are committed "out of the blue" and by people with no prior interaction with criminals?
- *Important Observations*
- Explains criminal and non-criminal behavior.
- Can explain variations in group rates of crime as well as individual criminality
- Can be applied to white-collar crime as well as street crime.

- Most important: served as the foundation for social learning theories of crime.
- *The Research*
- Empirical support for the idea that criminal behavior is learned and that juveniles who report more delinquent friends tend to commit more delinquent acts.
- Theory needs refinement to be more amenable to empirical tests (Social Learning Theory).