Chapter Outlines

# Chapter 10: Social Process and Control Theories of Crime

**Learning Objectives**

* Articulate what distinguishes learning theories of crime from other perspectives
* Distinguish differential association theory from differential reinforcement theory
* Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of differential association and differential reinforcement theory
* Define the five original techniques of neutralization and explain them
* Discuss early forms of social control theory, such as Hobbes and Freud
* Explain Reckless’s containment theory
* Hirschi’s social bonding theory, particularly the four elements of the bond
* Describe the key tenets of Integrated Social Control Theories
* Discuss low self-control theory, such as what personality traits are involved

**Summary**

This chapter focuses on social process and control theories of crime. Social process theories examine how individuals interact with other individuals and groups. The 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. Virtually, all learning theories assume that our attitudes and behavioral decisions are acquired via communication after we are born, so individuals enter the world with a blank slate (often referred to as tabula rasa). Next, control theories are discussed. Control theories focus on social or personal factors that prevent individuals from engaging in selfish, antisocial behaviors. Control theories assume that all people would naturally commit crimes if it was not for restraints on the selfish tendencies that exist in every individual.

Three learning theories are discussed: Differential Association Theory, Differential Reinforcement Theory, and Neutralization Theory. In his 1939, *Principles of Criminology*, Sutherland fully introduced his differential association theory. Sutherland presented his theory of differential association with nine specific statements. The primary concepts of differential association state that criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons, learning occurs within intimate personal groups, individuals learn definitions favorable or unfavorable to the legal code, and associations vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity. He proposed that criminality is learned just like any other conventional activity. In addition, he argued 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. The discussion of learning theories continues with differential reinforcement theory. Burgess and Akers criticized Sutherland’s work and the product of this criticism became known as differential reinforcement theory. They argued that by integrating Sutherland’s contributions with the learning models of operant conditioning and modeling/imitation—decisions to commit criminal behavior could be more clearly understood. In their 1966 article, Burgess and Akers presented seven propositions to summarize differential reinforcement theory. According to Burgess and Akers, criminal behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning and modeling/imitation. Additionally, criminal behavior is learned both in nonsocial and social interactions. Learning also occurs in groups which comprise the individual’s major source of reinforcements. Differential reinforcement theory assumes that individuals are born with a blank slate; socialized and taught how to behave through classical and operant conditioning as well as modeling; and behavior occurs and continues depending on past and present rewards and punishments. The section on learning theories concludes with the discussion of Neutralization Theory. Neutralization theory is associated with Sykes and 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. According to Sykes and Matza, youths are not immersed in a subculture that is committed to either extremes of complete conformity or complete nonconformity. Rather, these individuals drift between the two. 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. Sykes and Matza proposed five techniques of neutralization: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties.

The chapter concludes with the discussion of control theories. This section begins with the brief discussion of early control theories of human behavior: Hobbes, Durkheim’s idea of collective conscience, and Freud’s concept of the id and superego. The discussion continues with the early control theories of crime: Reiss’ control theory, Toby’s concept of stake in conformity, Nye’s control theory, and Reckless’ containment theory. These early control theories of crime assumed that individuals are naturally born selfish and greedy, and they must be socialized by others in order to control their inherent desires and drives. Most of the early theorists emphasized the need for external societal controls to counter the inner drives of people. Next, two modern control theories are discussed: Matza’s drift theory and Hirschi’s social bonding theory. Matza argued that offending behavior is the result of both free will/decision-making and deterministic factors outside of our control. According to the drift theory, offending typically peaks in the teenage years because that is the time when social controls over us are the weakest (i.e. we are no longer being monitored constantly by caretakers and the adulthood control factors have not yet kicked in). Perhaps the most influential social control theory was presented by Hirschi in 1969. Hirschi argued that the stronger the social bond, the less likely it is that an individual will commit criminal offenses. Social bond is made up of four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. The most important of these is attachment. The chapter concludes with the discussion of the integrated control theories of Tittle and Hagan, as well as Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of crime. In 1995, Tittle proposed his control-balance theory. 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. Individuals who are either too controlled by others or have too much control over others are more likely to commit crimes, as compared to people who have a healthy balance between the two. Power-control theory proposed by Hagan and his colleagues focuses on the level of patriarchal attitudes and structure in the household, which are influence by parental positions in the workforce. 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 when the parents have very different jobs. In unbalanced households, more controls are placed on daughters than sons. In 1990, Gottfredson and Hirschi proposed a general theory of low self-control, which is often referred to as the general 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. Furthermore, the general theory of crime assumes that self-control must be established by age 10. Without self-control established, individuals are more likely to engage in criminal and risky behaviors. 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.

**Chapter Outline**

* **Learning Theories**
	+ Explain the social process of how and why people engage in criminal behavior through learning.
	+ Virtually all learning theories assume that our attitudes and behavioral decisions are acquired via communication after we are born, so individuals enter the world with a blank slate (often referred to as *tabula rasa*).
	+ A key feature of learning theories of peers and significant others on an individual’s behavior.
	+ **Differential Association Theory**
		- Edwin H. Sutherland is considered one of the most influential criminologists of the twentieth century.
		- In his 1939, *Principles of Criminology* (3rd edition), 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 generation.
		- Influences
			* Shaw and McKay’s concept of social disorganization.
			* Tarde’s imitation theory.
				+ Three Laws of Imitation Theory

People imitate one another in proportion as they are in close contact;

Often the superior is imitated by the inferior; and

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.
				+ *Criminal behavior is learned*. Criminal behavior is not inherited; rather, a person needs to be trained, or educated in crime.
				+ *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.
				+ *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 that which occurs with simple acquaintances, as well as through the movies and other entertainment media.
				+ *When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple;**(b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes.* Criminals learn from others the techniques, methods, and motives necessary to sustain their behavior.
				+ *The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable and 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.
				+ *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.
				+ *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.
				+ *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.
				+ *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 that Sutherland wrote, namely strain theory, which emphasized economic goals and means in predicting criminal activity.
		- Differential association theory is just as deterministic as were the earlier theories that emphasized biological factors or psychological factors.
			* In other words, Sutherland strongly felt that if a person was receiving and internalizing a higher ratio of definitions from those close to them that breaking the law was beneficial, then it is assumed that they certainly will engage in such illegal behavior.
			* There is virtually no room for any possible free choice or decision-making going on in this model of criminal activity.
		- 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 as any of the pre-existing positive theories.
		- 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 that clearly shows that such variations in such physiological functioning does 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 that such detriments have on the learning process of people in everyday life.
		- **Classical Conditioning**
			* At the time in which he developed his theory of differential association, Sutherland used the dominant psychological theory of learning of the early 20th century.
			* This learning model was classical conditioning, which 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 they simply receive and respond to various forms of stimuli and respond in natural ways to such stimuli.
			* Furthermore, the organism (i.e., individual) will learn to associate certain stimuli with certain responses over time.
			* In developing the theory, Pavlov performed seminal research that showed dogs, which are naturally afraid of loud noises such as bells, could be quickly conditioned to not only be less afraid of bells, but to actually desire and salivate at their sound.
				+ Specifically, a dog naturally salivates when presented with meat.

So when this presentation of an unconditioned stimuli (meat) is given, 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 stimuli) is always rung at the same time the dog is presented with meat, then the dog will learn to associate what was previously a negative stimulus with positive stimuli (food).

Thus, the dog will very quickly begin salivating at the ringing of 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 very powerful and effective means of learning and it can sometimes take only a few occurrences of coupling the bell ringing with meat before the unconditioned response takes place.

* + - **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.
				+ Some people assume that Sutherland’s theory is only concerned with associations between criminals.

If this was the only relevant type of association, then the theory is invalid because some people have an extensive association with criminal behavior patterns but are not considered criminals.

* + - * As indicated, Sutherland theorized that crime occurs when the ratio of 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.
			* 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, in an MBA program, found 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.

* + - * Sutherland theorized that criminal associations lead to crime, but the reverse is plausible.
				+ That is, one may commit crime and then seek out individuals with attitudes similar to their own.
				+ After a rather lengthy literary debate, most recent research points to both causal processes occurring: criminal associations cause more crime, *and* committing crime causes more criminal associations.
			* If criminal behavior is learned, and people are born with a blank slate (referred to as *tabula rasa*), then who first committed crime if no one taught them the techniques and motives for it?
			* If they were the first to do it, then who could expose them to the definitions favorable to violation of law?
			* What factor(s) caused that individual to do it first if it was not learned?
				+ If the answers to these questions involve any other factor(s) than learning, which it must have been because the theory’s assumptions assume there was no one to teach it, then it obviously was not explained by learning theories.

This is a criticism that really cannot be addressed, so it is somewhat ignored in the scientific literature.

* + - * Some research is supportive of Sutherland’s theory.
				+ 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.
			* Many of Sutherland’s principles are somewhat vague and cryptic, which does not lend the theory to easy testing.
			* 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 that we learn attitudes and behavior from significant others.
			* Sutherland was adamant about such learning of how and why to commit crime was *only* through social interaction with significant others, and *not* from any media role-models, such as in movies, radio, etc.
		- **Glaser’s Concept of Differential Identification**
			* 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 who 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’ (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.
			* Far more research should examine the validity of Glaser’s theory in contemporary society given the profound influence of video games, movies, music, and television on today’s youth culture.
	+ **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—also often referred to as social learning theory in the criminological literature.
			* Propositions
				+ Criminal behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning.
				+ 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.
				+ The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs in those groups which comprise the individual’s major source of reinforcements.
				+ 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.
				+ 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.
				+ 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.
				+ The strength of criminal behavior is a direct function of the amount, frequency, and probability of its reinforcement.
			* Differential reinforcement theory, however, can be distinguished from the rational choice perspective
				+ Rational choice assumes humans are born with an innate capacity for rational decision making,
				+ 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), as well as modeling.
				+ 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/free choice (but rather is based on the definitions, beliefs, rewards, punishments, etc., they 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.
		- **Psychological Learning Models**
			* **Operant Conditioning**
				+ Primarily developed by B.F. Skinner.
				+ Concerned with how behavior is influenced by reinforcements and punishments.
				+ Assumes that the animal or human being is a proactive player in seeking out rewards, and not just a passive entity that simply receives stimuli.
				+ Certain behaviors are encouraged through reward (**positive reinforcement**) or through avoidance of punishment (**negative reinforcement**).
				+ Like different types of reinforcement, punishment comes in two forms as well.

Behavior is discouraged, or weakened, via adverse stimuli (positive punishment) or lack of reward (negative punishment).

A positive punishment would be anything that directly presents negative sensations or feelings.

* + - * + A large amount of research has shown that humans learn attitudes and behavior best through a mix of punishments and reinforcements throughout life.

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.

* + - * + Illegal behavior is likely to occur, as Burgess and Akers theorized, when its perceived rewards outweigh the potential punishments for not committing such activities.
			* **Bandura’s Theory of Imitation/Modeling**
				+ 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.
				+ People learn much of their attitudes and behavior form simply observing the behavior of others, namely through mimicking what others do.
				+ Bandura performed experiments in which randomized experimental group of children watched a video of adults acting aggressively toward Bo-Bo dolls (which are blow-up plastic dolls), 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 and the experimental group who had seen the adult behavior mimicked their behavior by acting far more aggressively toward the dolls than the children in the control group, who had not seen the adults beating up the dolls.

* + - * + His theory of modeling and imitation not only has implications for the criminal behavior of individuals, but they also have important implications for the influence of television, movies, video games, and so on.
		- **Reaction to Differential Reinforcement Theory**
			* Reed Adams criticized the theory for incorrectly and incompletely applying the principles of operant condition.
				+ 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.

* + - * 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/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 inevitably be more likely to offend.
			* 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 has also been criticized in the same way as differential association theory has in the sense the delinquent associations may take place after criminal activity, rather than before.
				+ However, Burgess and Akers’ model clearly has this area of criticism covered in the sense that 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/institutions of society.

* + - * It is arguable that differential reinforcement theory may have the most empirical validity of any contemporary (non-integrated) model of criminal offending, especially considering that studies have examined a variety of behaviors, ranging from drug use to property crimes to violence.
			* 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 regards to criminal behavior.
			* 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**
		- Neutralization theory is associated with Gresham Sykes and David Matza’s *Techniques of Neutralization* and Matza’s *Drift Theory*.
		- Sykes and Matza argued that most criminals are still partially committed to the dominant social order.
		- Youths are not immersed in a subculture that is committed to either extremes of complete conformity or complete nonconformity.
		- Rather, these individuals 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?
			* The answer is that people justify and rationalize behavior through “neutralizing” it, or making it appear not so serious.
			* In other words, individuals make up situational excuses for behavior that they know is wrong, and they do this to alleviate the guilt they feel for doing such immoral acts.
		- **Techniques of Neutralization**
			* *Denial of Responsibility*: Denial of responsibility is more than just claiming that deviant acts are an accident. Rather, individuals may claim that due to forces outside themselves (e.g., uncaring parents, bad friends, or 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.
			* *Denial of Injury*: Criminals may evaluate their wrongful behavior in terms of whether anyone was hurt by their behavior. For instance, vandalism may be considered as simply “mischief”; stealing a car may be viewed as “borrowing.” Sometimes society agrees with people who evaluate their wrongfulness in this manner in terms of designating these activities as “pranks.”
			* *Denial of the Victim*: While criminal may accept responsibility for their actions and may admit these actions involved an injury, they neutralize these actions as being a rightful retaliation or punishment. Criminals may perceive themselves as avengers and the victim is 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 alleviate such losses and higher insurance premiums.
			* *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, and parents “take it out” on their children. Thus, criminals neutralize their behavior through “a rejection of the rejectors.”
			* *Appeal to Higher Loyalties*: Criminals may sacrifice the rules of the larger society for the rules of the smaller social groups to which the person belongs, such as a gang or peer group. Criminals are then caught in a dilemma. 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. They may claim that one must “always help a buddy” or “never squeal on a friend.” Another example of this technique is that of anti-abortion radicals who shoot doctors who perform abortions; they claim they are appealing to a higher loyalty (a supreme being) which alleviates them from responsibility or guilt.
			* One area that techniques of neutralization have been applied is to 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 examine the decision-making of 133 MBA 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 that was harmful), but that 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 tend to 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 if they do something immoral as long as the behavior is perceived as necessary.

*Metaphor of the ledger* 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 they are entitled to mess up by doing something illegal (e.g., “cook the books” or knowingly distribute a faulty, dangerous product).

* + - **Reaction to Neutralization Theory**
			* Studies that have attempted to empirically test neutralization theory are, at best, inconclusive.
			* Robert Agnew argued that they are essentially two general criticisms of studies that support neutralization theory.
				+ The first challenge is that several researches have improperly measured the acceptance of neutralization techniques.
				+ Second, researchers have expressed concern that criminals may use techniques of neutralization prior to committing a criminal offense.
* **Control Theories**
	+ Control theories assume that all people would naturally commit crimes if it wasn’t for restraints on the selfish tendencies that exist in every individual.
	+ Control theorists rhetorically ask, “What is it about society, human interaction, and other factors that cause people not to act on their natural impulses.”
	+ **Early Control Theories of Human Behavior**
		- **Thomas Hobbes**
			* 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.
			* He also theorized that this constant state of chaos create such fear among many individuals that it resulted in them coming together to rationally develop a pact that would prevent such chaos.
			* Hobbes claimed that by creating a society and forming binding contracts (or laws), that this would alleviate the chaos by deterring individuals from violating others’ rights.
				+ Despite such laws, Hobbes doubted that the innately greedy nature of humans would not be completely eliminated.
				+ The existence of such innate selfishness and aggressiveness was exactly why the use of punishments was necessary; their purpose being to induce fear into 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.
		- **Emile Durkheim’s Idea of Collective Conscience**
			* Suggested humans have no internal mechanisms 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 with reference to animals’ eating habits. Specifically, animals stop eating when they are full and they are content until they are hungry again; they do not start hunting again right after they have filled their stomach with food.
				+ In contrast, awakened reflection concerns the fact that humans do not have such an internal, regulatory mechanism. That is because people often acquire resources beyond what is immediately required.
				+ 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.

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.
				+ The notion of collective conscience can be seen as an early form of the idea of social bonding.
			* According to Durkheim, the collective conscience serves many functions in society.
				+ One such function is the ability to establish rules that control individuals from following their natural tendencies toward selfish behavior.
				+ Durkheim also believed that crime allows people to unite together in opposition against deviants.
		- **Freud’s Concept of Id and Superego**
			* 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.
			* Another one of Freud’s assumptions is that this inherent, selfish tendency must be countered by controls produced from the development of the “Superego.”
			* The Superego is the domain of the psyche that contains our conscience, is formed through the interactions that occur between a young infant/child and their significant others.
	+ **Early Control Theories of Crime**
		- **Reiss’ Control Theory**
			* One of the first control theories.
			* Claimed that delinquency was a consequence of weak controls that resulted in weak ego or superego controls among juvenile probationers.
			* 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.
			* Believed the family was the primary source through which deviant predispositions were discouraged.
			* A sound family environment would provide for an individual’s needs and the essential emotional bonds that are so important in socializing individuals.
			* In addition, 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.
			* Although the direct tests of Reiss’ theory have only provided partial support for it, Reiss’ influence is apparent in many contemporary criminological theories.
		- **Toby’s Concept of “Stake in Conformity”**
			* Claimed that individuals were more inclined to act on their natural inclinations when the controls on them were weak.
			* 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 have investments in conventional society.
			* 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 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 their 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**
			* Claimed that there was no significant positive force that caused delinquency, because such antisocial tendencies are universal and would be found in virtually everyone if not for certain controls usually found in the home.
			* Three Primary Components of Control
				+ Internal Control

Formed through social interaction.

This socialization assists in the development of a conscience.

If individuals are not given adequate resources and care, they will follow their natural tendencies toward doing what was necessary to protect their interests.

* + - * + Direct Control

Consists of a wide range of constraints on individual propensities to commit deviant acts.

Includes numerous types of sanctions, such as jail and ridicule, and the restriction of one’s chances to commit criminal activity.

* + - * + Indirect Control

Occurs when individuals are strongly attached to their early care-givers.

Nye suggested that when the needs of an individual are not met by their care-givers, inappropriate behavior can result.

* + - * 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 health balance of freedom and parental control was the best strategy for inhibiting criminal behavior.
			* Some recent research supports Nye’s prediction.
		- **Reckless’ Containment Theory**
			* Emphasizes both inner containment and outer containment, which can be viewed as internal and external controls.
			* Identified predictive factors that push and/or pull individuals toward antisocial behavior.
			* 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 some individual factors, such as brain disorders or risk-taking personalities, could push some people to commit criminal behavior.
			* Some individuals can be pulled into criminal activity by hanging out with delinquent pees, watching too much violence on television, and so on.
			* Containment theory proposes that extra pushes and pulls can motivate people to commit crime.
			* Pushes and pulls toward criminal behavior could be enough to force individuals into criminal activity unless they are sufficiently contained or controlled.
				+ 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.
			* 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.
			* 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 other factors, such as self-perception.
			* Some studies have noted weaker support for Reckless’ theory among minorities and females.
			* 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.
	+ **Modern Social Control Theories**
		- **Matza’s Drift Theory**
			* Individuals offend at certain times in their life 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.
			* 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.
			* The time in which social controls are most weakened for the majority of individuals is during the teenage years.
				+ This is very consistent with the well-known age-crime relationship; most individuals who are arrested are in their teenage years.
				+ Once sufficient ties are developed, people tend to mature out of criminal lifestyles.
			* When supervision is absent and ties are minimal, the majority of individuals are the most “free” to do what they want.
			* It is during these times that people have few ties and obligations that they will “drift” in and out of delinquency.
			* 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.
			* Individuals do not reject the conventional normative structure.
				+ 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.
			* 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 for “drifting” into crime and delinquency.
			* Empirical research examining the theory has been mixed.
			* One of the primary criticisms of Matza’s theory is that the theory does not explain the most chronic offenders, the people who are responsible for the vast majority of the serious, violent crimes.
			* 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.
			* 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.
		- **Hirschi’s Social Bonding Theory**
			* Perhaps the most influential social control theory.
			* Hirschi’s theory of **social bonding** takes an assumption from Durkheim that “we are all animals, and thus naturally capable of committing criminal acts.”
			* 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.
			* 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.
			* Four Elements of Bond
				+ Attachment

Consist of affectionate bonds between an individual and his or her significant others.

* + - * + Commitment

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 a crime.

* + - * + Involvement

The time spent in conventional activities.

The assumption is that time spent in constructive activities will reduce time devoted to illegal behaviors.

* + - * + Belief

Has 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.

* + - * 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 only predict criminality 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.

It appears that only academic or religious activities seem to have consistent effects on inhibiting delinquency.

* + - * Another major criticism of Hirschi’s theory is that the effects of “attachments” on crime depends on who one is attached to.
			* 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.
			* Despite the criticism it has received, Hirschi’s social bonding theory is still one of the most accepted theories of criminal behavior.
	+ **Integrated Social Control Theories**
		- **Tittle’s 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 that is likely to be committed.
			* A person is least likely to offend when he or she has a balance of controlling and being controlled.
			* If individuals are more controlled (Tittle calls this “control deficit”), then the theory predicts they will commit predatory r defiant acts.
			* 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.
			* Excessive control is not the same as excessive self-control.
			* Initial empirical tests of Control-Balance Theory have reported mixed results, with both surpluses and deficits predicting the same types of deviance.
			* Additionally, researchers have uncovered differing effects of the control balance ratio on two types of deviance that are contingent on gender.
		- **Hagan’s Power-Control Theory**
			* 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 upon 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 their 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 provide 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.
			* 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 makes a difference in how people will act throughout life.
	+ **A General Theory of Crime: Low Self-Control**
		- In 1990, Travis 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 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.
		- Furthermore, the general theory of crime assumes that self-control must be established by age 10.
			* If it has not formed by that time, then, according to the theory, individuals will forever exhibit low self-control.
		- Although Gottfredson and Hirschi still attribute the formation of controls as coming from the socialization processes, 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.
		- **Psychological Aspects of Low Self-Control**
			* Criminologists have recently claimed that low self-control may be due to the emotional disposition of individuals.
				+ 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.
		- **Physiological Aspects of Low Self-Control**
			* Research has shown that chronic offenders show greater arousal toward danger and risk taking than 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 their brain.
			* Researchers have also found that criminal offenders generally perceive a significantly lower level of internal sanctions (e.g., shame, guilt, and embarrassment) than do non-offenders.
			* A select group of individuals appear to physiologically and psychologically derive 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 very dangerous and helps explain why some impulsive individuals often end up in prison.
			* 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 to experience internal emotional sanctioning for offenses they have committed than are males.
* **Policy Implications**
	+ One needs to emphasize positive, or prosocial, role models and avoid negative, or antisocial role models.
	+ Head Start
		- Attempts to provide youths with more positive, or favorable definitions of conventional behavior.
	+ Engaging 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**

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| Theory | Concepts | Proponents | Key Propositions |
| Differential Association | Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons; learning occurs within intimate personal groups; learn definitions favorable or unfavorable to the legal code; associations vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity. | Edwin Sutherland | 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. |
| Differential Reinforcement Theory | Criminal behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning and modeling/imitation; criminal behavior is learned both in nonsocial and social interactions; learning occurs in groups which comprise the individual’s major source of reinforcements. | Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers | Assumes individuals are born with a blank slate; 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. |
| Techniques of Neutralization | Criminals are still partially committed to the dominant social order; there are five techniques of neutralization to justify criminal behavior. | Gresham Sykes and David Matza | 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. |
| Early Control Theories | Individuals are naturally born selfish and greedy, and they must be socialized by others in order to control their inherent desires and drives. | Freud, Toby, Reiss, Nye, Reckless, and others | Most of the early theorists emphasized the need for external societal controls to counter the inner drives of people; as 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. |
| Theory of Drift | Soft determinism, meaning that offending behavior is the result of both free will/decision making and deterministic factors outside of our control. | David Matza | Offending typically peaks in the teenage years because that is the time when social controls over us are weakest; that is, we are no longer being monitored constantly by caretakers, and the adulthood control factors of marriage, employment, etc. have not kicked in yet. |
| Social Bonding Theory | The social bond is made up of 4 elements: attachments, commitment, involvement, and moral beliefs. | Travis Hirschi | A very simple theory in the sense that as each of the four elements of the social bond are stronger, the less likelihood of offending due to being more bonded to conventional society. |
| Balance-Control Theory | Control deficit and control surplus. | Charles Tittle | Individuals who are either too controlled by others or have too much control over others are more likely to commit crimes, as compared to people who have a healthy balance between the two. |
| Power-Control Theory | Balanced and unbalanced households. | John Hagan | 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 very different jobs, which lead to more controls placed on daughters than sons. |
| Low Self-Control Theory | Bad child rearing. | Michael Gottfredson & Travis Hirschi | Bad parenting (abusive, inconsistent, lack of monitoring, neglectful) results in lack of development of self-control, which then leads to criminality and risky behaviors. |