

# UC Riverside

## UC Riverside Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Social Learning, Social Control, and Strain Theories: A Formalization of Micro-level Criminological Theories

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/20p8s027>

### Author

Proctor, Kristopher Ryan

### Publication Date

2010

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Social Learning, Social Control, and Strain Theories:  
A Formalization of Micro-level Criminological Theories

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Kristopher Ryan Proctor

August 2010

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Austin Turk, Chairperson

Dr. Jonathan H. Turner

Dr. Kirk Williams

Copyright by  
Kristopher Ryan Proctor  
2010

The Dissertation of Kristopher Ryan Proctor is approved:

---

---

---

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation represents the culmination of years of training, and I can not claim sole responsibility for its production or completion. I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee - Austin Turk, Jonathan Turner, and Kirk Williams - for all their invaluable comments and advice during the dissertation process. I would also like to acknowledge Steven Brint, Robert Hanneman, Peter Burke, Robert Nash Parker, and Jan Stets for their mentorship during my tenure as a graduate student at UCR. Without the influences of all these faculty members, this dissertation would not have been possible.

## DEDICATIONS

This dissertation is dedicated to Catherine Rippergerger and my parents. I would like to thank Catherine for her love and support throughout all of graduate school and all of our zany adventures. I would like to thank my parents, Jerry and Elizabeth Proctor, for bringing me into this world and supporting me at each step on the seemingly endless stairway to my doctorate.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Social Learning, Social Control, and Strain Theories:  
A Formalization of Micro-level Criminological Theories

by

Kristopher Ryan Proctor

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology  
University of California, Riverside, August 2010  
Dr. Austin T. Turk, Chairperson

This dissertation proposes theoretical formalization as a way of enhancing theory development within criminology. Differential association, social learning, social control, and general strain theories are formalized in order to identify assumptions of human nature, key theoretical concepts, theoretical knowledge claims, and scope conditions. The resulting formalization allows greater comparability between theories in terms of explanatory power, and additionally provides insights into integration and elaboration as forms of theory development.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Integration/Elaboration Debate.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Sociological Theory Formalization.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Proposed Theoretical Method.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Proposed Formalization of Criminological Theory.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Theory Evaluation.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Differential Association Theory.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Theoretical Overview.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Assumptions of Human Nature.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Theoretical Restatement.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Scope Conditions.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Theoretical Restatement.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>Social Learning Theory.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Assumptions of Human Nature.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Theoretical Formalization.....</b>	<b>45</b>



<b>Scope Conditions.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Theoretical Restatment.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Social Control Theory.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Assumptions of Human Nature.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Theoretical Formalization.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Scope Conditions.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Theoretical Restatment.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>General Strain Theory.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Assumptions of Human Nature.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Theoretical Formalization.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Theoretical Ambiguities and Tautologies.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Integrative Tautologies.....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Scope Conditions.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Theoretical Restatment.....</b>	<b>110</b>

<b>Chapter 6</b>	
<b>Theory Evaluation.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Human Nature and Scope Conditions.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Explanan and Explanatory Power.....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>Theoretical Explanandum.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>150</b>

**Figures**

**Figure 1.1: Cohen’s Theoretical Model.....8**

**Figure 2.1: Differential Association Theory.....27**

**Figure 3.1: Parsimonious Social Learning Theory Model.....46**

**Figure 3.2: Detailed Social Learning Theory Model.....56**

**Figure 4.1: Social Control Theoretical Model.....67**

**Figure 4.2: Generalized Social Control Theoretical Model .....74**

**Figure 5.1: General Strain Theory.....88**

**Figure 5.2: Conceptual Overlap Among General Strain Theory  
Concepts.....97**

**Figure 5.3: Conceptual Overlap Between General Strain  
Theory Concepts and Social Control and Social Learning  
Theory Concepts.....102**

**Tables**

**Table 6.1: Scope Conditions of Formalized Criminological Theories.....118**

**Table 6.2: Summary of Explanan of Formalized Theories.....127**

**Table 6.3: Summary of Explananda of Formalized Theories.....132**

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The late 1970s and the entire 1980s was an era of great theoretical concern for criminologists. With a perceived failure of criminological theory to account for sufficient variation in crime, Elliot and his colleagues (1979) proposed an integration of learning, control, and strain theories in order to better explain delinquency. Following this integrative effort, criminologists began to seriously debate the nature of theory development in criminology. While many supported integrative efforts (e.g., Bernard 1989, 2001; Bernard and Snipes 1996; Elliot, Ageton, and Canter 1979; Short 1979, 1985), others argued that theoretical integration was a poor mode of theory development because integrated theories would inevitably lack logical consistency since they tended to have contradictory assumptions (e.g., Hirschi 1979, 1989; Liska, Krohn, and Messner 1989; Thornberry 1989).

The purpose of this dissertation will be to promote a yet untapped method of allowing for cumulative theory development in criminology. With the exception of DeFleur and Quinney (1966), no effort to formalize existing criminological theory has been made, and doing so could greatly enable criminologists to better assess criminological theory prior to engaging in integration or elaboration. Working towards this end, and prior to engaging in any theoretical formalizations, four issues will be discussed that are relevant to theoretical development within criminology. First, an overview will be provided of the integration/elaboration debate that occurred within criminology. This debate surrounded whether criminological theories could be integrated, or instead should be elaborated because integration was not seen by some as a satisfactory mode of theory development. Second, theoretical formalization will be discussed in order to articulate its meaning. As

there are many ways a theory can be formalized, it is important to review the various ways theories can be stated before selecting a theoretical method for formalizing criminological theories. Third, an approach to formalizing criminological theories will be detailed that focuses on differential association, social learning, social control, and general strain theories. Since these theories have been at the center of the integration/elaboration debate, they serve as an excellent starting point to begin formalizing criminological theories. Fourth, a method for evaluating theory will be discussed that assesses theory based upon theoretical and empirical criteria.

### **The Integration/Elaboration Debate**

Perceiving theoretical stagnation in criminology, Elliot, Ageton, and Canter (1979) proposed an integration of anomie, control, and learning theories in order to maximize explanatory power when attempting to explain delinquency. The basic model held that variables associated with anomie theory were most remote to delinquency and that control and learning theory variables moderated the effects of anomie on crime. While Short (1979) was generally supportive of the effort, Hirschi (1979) was not. Hirschi identified several modes of theory integration, but ultimately concluded that no mode of integration is appropriate because the theories being integrated inevitably contain contradictory assumptions and such efforts necessarily violate them. In Hirschi's view, theoretical competition was healthy and integrative efforts were to be avoided. Elliot (1985) defended the use of integration and noted that theories are constantly changing and being adapted for new uses. He further argued that theoretical competition was a failure, an observation later echoed by others (e.g., Bernard 1989, 2001; Bernard and Snipes 1996), by noting that crucial tests have been largely ineffective in resolving theoretical competition. He also observed that most criminological theories were really a handful of variables ex-

plaining only particular aspects of crime and that these theories were perhaps more aptly identified as hypotheses.

The debate culminated in a conference where criminologists attempted to sort out how theoretical development should occur. The resulting conference, and the edited book it produced, did little to resolve the debate. While some preferred theoretical elaboration over integration (e.g., Hirschi 1989; Liska, Krohn, and Messner 1989; Thornberry 1989), others maintained their support for integration (e.g., Akers 1989; Short 1989; Bernard 1989). Those preferring theoretical elaboration maintained their concern for logical consistency in theory, while those favoring integrative efforts stood strong in their position that different theories were really operating at different levels of analysis and that many of the assumptions preventing integration were really unnecessary in the first place.

Throughout the integration debate several issues proved central. The initial issue was whether competing theories with contradictory assumptions could be logically joined. Hirschi (1979, 1989) was the most vocal critic of integrative efforts and argued that criminological theory had evolved out of an “oppositional tradition” in which theories were explicitly formulated to contradict rival theories. Since these theories were contradictory, crucial tests could be devised and as a result the pool of competing theories could be reduced. Akers (1989) disagreed with this perspective and argued that many of the assumptions being discussed surrounding human nature were unnecessary to their respective theories. If these assumptions were truly unnecessary, it only followed that they could be eliminated and integration efforts could proceed. A second issue was that differing levels of analysis complicated the “oppositional tradition” because theories were explaining different aspects of crime at different levels of analysis (Short 1985, 1989). Under this view, since theories were explaining crime at different levels of analysis they were not really in competition with one another and assumptions bearing on theories at one level of analysis had little to do with theories being specified at another level.

As integrationists and those favoring the “oppositional theory” were largely talking past one another, a third view on the matter was presented which largely fell upon deaf ears. Jack P. Gibbs (1972, 1985, 1989) had long argued that the major problem with sociological and criminological theory was that it was formulated discursively. As a result of the informality in which theory was communicated, definitions and relationships presented within theories were often ambiguous and such theories often proved untestable. Meier (1985b) had also begun to emphasize this concern by gathering several criminologists to write on the issue of theoretical methods. Meier (1985a) himself noted that within criminology it was particularly difficult to train criminologists in theoretical methods because they tend to have highly substantive interests. Despite the interest of others in theoretical methods, Gibbs remained rather pessimistic about the prospects of formal theory and remarked, “Should an imaginative criminologist realize a formal statement of Sutherland, Merton, and Hirschi that promotes defensible tests, there might be no accolades” (1989: 48).

Regardless of Gibbs’ prophetic warning, it is the intent of this dissertation to precisely realize a formal statement of “oppositional tradition” theories in an effort to provide another tool in assisting theory development in criminology. Prior to attempting such an effort, it is first important to discuss formal theory in more detail.

### **Sociological Theory Formalization**

If criminological theory is to be advanced through formalization, it is necessary to specify what formalization entails. While there is no agreement as to how theory should be formalized (Gibbs 1972; Hage 1994), at a bare minimum a theory can be considered formal when it is expressed in terms that are not part of conventional language (Gibbs 1972).



Turner's (1991) discussion of theoretical formats is particularly useful when discussing theory formalization. Turner specifies three theoretical formats which will be relevant to this proposed dissertation: (1) axiomatic schemes; (2) formal theoretical schemes; and (3) analytic models. Ultimately, a hybrid methodology containing elements of all three schemes will be employed when formalizing criminological theories.

### **Axiomatic Schemes**

Axiomatic theories contain propositional statements that can be hierarchically ordered, provide definitions of concepts that are both abstract and concrete, and provide scope conditions which specify the types of situations in which the theory is able to accurately make predictions (Turner 1991). There are many who advocate this mode of theorizing (e.g., Gibbs 1972, Fararo 1989, Freese 1980). Turner (1991) notes there are several advantages and disadvantages to axiomatic theory. In terms of advantages, axiomatic theories tend to be stated abstractly, and as a result have greater explanatory power. Additionally, the logical connection between concepts in axiomatic theories allows for the derivation of unanticipated propositions. Despite these strengths, weaknesses of this approach surround problems associated with the ability to precisely define concepts or state relationships between concepts within sociology. Additionally, axiomatic theory requires the control of extraneous variables, and this is something sociology can rarely adequately perform.

Beyond Turner's critiques of axiomatic theory, two additional critiques could be made. First, there is no consensus on what the terms employed by axiomatic theories mean (Gibbs 1972). Propositions, axioms, hypotheses, and theorems tend to be used interchangeably. As a result, one wishing to employ such a scheme must either select a theoretical method from a cornucopia of different methods or create one. Second, since there is no agreement on what conventions are to be used when engaging in formal theo-

rizing, the employment of any axiomatic method, regardless of whether it is chosen from a selection of preexisting methods or generated anew, requires the theorist to: (1) devote a great deal of effort to specify the method being employed; (2) provide definitions of all the terms used in the method (in addition to defining the terms of the theory itself); and (3) engage in a little wishful thinking that a sociological audience will take the time to learn the theoretical method in *addition* to the theory. In short, axiomatic theory creates a large transaction cost. While it could be argued that things may be different in criminology, not one of the major theories in criminology is stated in an axiomatic format, and criminologists in general tend to be more concerned with substantive issues (Meier 1985a).

### **Formal Theoretical Schemes**

The second theoretical scheme discussed by Turner (1991) is formal theory. Theories of this type are much like axiomatic schemes in that they entail abstract concepts and relationships and hope to explain empirical events as instances of a particular law. They differ from axiomatic schemes in that rather than trying to account for the impact of extraneous phenomena on a theoretical explanation, propositional schemes instead state relationships to hold *ceteris paribus*.

### **Analytical Models**

Analytical models are like path analytical models, except the relationships specified are theoretical rather than empirical (Turner 1991). These models allow for the visual representation of complex relationships between multiple concepts. Complex relationships might include causal feedback loops and tend to work well with formal and axiomatic theory. These models allow for the parsimonious presentation of complex formalized theory.

## **Proposed Theoretical Method**

While Turner's distinction between axiomatic and formal theories is useful, in reality the distinction between these two types of theories can be blurred; this is particularly the case with Cohen's (1980, 1989) theoretical method. Cohen's basic formalization scheme consists of knowledge claims, initial condition statements, scope condition statements, and observational statements that can be specified in simple propositional terms or in a more elaborate axiomatic format. Within this framework, theories consist of a number of interconnected knowledge claims, which are propositional statements between abstract concepts. When translating these statements into empirically testable observational statements, initial condition statements are employed to link empirical phenomena to corresponding concepts located within the knowledge claim being examined. Scope condition statements are employed in order to further specify the conditions under which the knowledge claim is expected to hold true. Rather than engage in a complicated calculus to formally deduce hypotheses<sup>1</sup>, Cohen employs a rather simple process for deriving hypotheses in which initial condition statements specify the epistemic relationship between a concept in the knowledge claim and an empirical term in the observational statement. This allows for an observational statement to be derived from the knowledge claim and the knowledge claim to be tested.

Figure 1.1 provides an illustration of Cohen's model. As evident in the example, terms within the initial and scope condition statements correspond to concepts contained within the knowledge claim. Additionally, the empirical terms identified in the initial and scope condition statements are then used in the operational statement to allow for the knowledge claim to be tested. Scope conditions also play an important role as they demarcate the conditions under which the knowledge claim is likely to be verified. While the derived terms in the initial conditions statement may not adhere to the rigorous deductive logic advocated by Gibbs (1972), and be more in line with what (Turner 1994) identi-

**Figure 1.1**  
**Cohen's Theoretical Model**

---

<i>Scope Condition:</i>	Family is held constant.
<i>Knowledge Claim:</i>	The more the family stability the less a person will participate in crime.
<i>Initial conditions:</i>	(1) In society <i>x</i> at time <i>y</i> , a marriage is a type of family.  (2) In society <i>x</i> at time <i>y</i> , the number of fights a couple gets into is an example of marital instability.  (3) In society <i>x</i> at time <i>y</i> , driving a car while intoxicated is an instance of a crime.
<i>Observational Statement:</i>	In society <i>x</i> at time <i>y</i> , holding family constant, driving while intoxicated will increase with levels of couple fights.

---

fies as “folk deductions”, Cohen’s strategy has an advantage over purely formal schemes in that it allows for a clearer epistemic relationship between a theoretical propositions and observational statements. This strategy also has an advantage over purely axiomatic schemes in that it is rather parsimonious and incurs much less of a transaction cost for those who should wish to learn it.

In terms of criminological theory, this mode of theorizing has tremendous implications. As noted by countless criminologists (e.g., Akers 1968; Cressey 1951; Gibbs 1965; Jeffery 1959; Quinney 1965; Turk 1964), etiological theories of crime say nothing about variations that lead to the defining of acts to be criminal. Hirschi ([1969] 2005) defines law to be the product of value consensus in control theory<sup>2</sup>, while others define law to be the product of conflict (e.g., Becker 1963; Bonger 1969; Turk 1969; 2001; Vold,

Bernard, and Snipes 1998). In criminological theories, definitions of crime can be also be viewed as scope conditions rather than assumptions. This allows for theories to be elaborated as scope conditions are relaxed. It also allows for future integrative efforts as relaxed scope conditions no longer serve as a logical barrier to integration.

As previously noted, no consensus exists in terms of what theoretical method is best to employ when formalizing theory. This being the case, Cohen's theoretical method will be combined with the use of analytical models in order to formalize "oppositional tradition" theories. This selection is appropriate for several reasons. First, theoretical arguments surrounding the "oppositional tradition" rest on the various assumptions contained within the theories. Using a purely formal mode of formalization would not allow for this problem to be addressed because it lacks the ability to translate assumptions into scope conditions. Second, despite the best efforts of Gibbs, axiomatic theory has never taken off in criminology or sociology. The transaction costs associated with this theoretical method are simply too high to expect such an effort to have an impact. Since this dissertation is intended to help resolve problems in criminological theory development, it is also important for the formalizations to be conducted in a manner amenable to criminologists whose interests lie in substantive theory. Cohen's model allows for the best combination of formality and parsimony that is also able to address the problem of contradictory underlying assumptions in criminological theory.

Analytical models will also be employed in order to provide a topology of the knowledge claims contained within the various theories. While Cohen's overall theoretical method can allow for the in-depth analysis of particular knowledge claims, the use of analytical models can provide a detailed, yet also parsimonious, view of the constellation of knowledge claims within a theory. In the next section, the use of these methods as they apply to the "oppositional tradition" will be further specified.

### **Proposed Formalization of Criminological Theory**

In order to help resolve problems in theoretical integration and cumulative theory development in criminology, those criminological theories identified to be part of the “oppositional tradition” will be formalized. Several steps will need to be taken to ensure that the formalization process results in a system of knowledge claims that adequately reflect the relationships specified as part of the original theory. The first step will be to identify the “oppositional tradition” theories that will be formalized. The following steps will detail the process of theory formalization.

#### **Theories to Be Formalized**

As a result of Elliot, Ageton, and Cantor’s (1979) attempted integration, the three main theoretical traditions that have been at the heart of the integration/elaboration debate have been control, anomie, and learning theories. During the debate, the implicit assumptions contained within these theories, as identified by Kornhauser (1978), served as the basis for denying the possibility of criminological theory integration. When selecting among “oppositional theories” to be formalized, only those theories that were both part of the integration/elaboration debate and those theories identified to have contradictory assumptions by Kornhauser will be included. These theories include differential association (Sutherland 1947; Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill 1992), social learning (Akers 1985, 1992; Burgess and Akers 1966), social control (Hirschi [1969] 2004), and general strain theories (Agnew 1992, 2006). While anomie theory (Merton 1968) originally represented strain theories within the oppositional tradition, it will be substituted in this formalization effort with general strain theory because anomie theory is a macrolevel explanation of deviant behavior and all other theories provide microlevel explanations of deviant behavior. The use of general strain theory enables theoretical comparison to focus on only microlevel theories. It is important to compare theories at the same level

of analysis because theories explaining criminal behavior at disparate levels of analysis necessarily contain different assumptions as a result of their need to hold phenomena at other levels of analysis constant to arrive at specific predictions.

While these theories have been elaborated over time, it is important to note that the purpose of this dissertation is not to assess their empirical support or elaborate upon their historical development. As such, this dissertation will only focus on identifying the knowledge claims and scope conditions of “oppositional tradition” theories and will not seek to translate these into observational or initial condition statements. Additionally, no effort will be made to provide a detailed intellectual history of the theories being formalized. In the case of differential association theory, its intellectual history is explored only insofar as doing so allows the formalization to contain definitions of theoretical concepts. This is necessary as a result of Sutherland’s failure to provide definitions within differential association theory. The intent of this dissertation is to formalize these theories because debates surrounding their knowledge claims and assumptions continue to hinder cumulative knowledge development in criminology.

### **Defining Key Theoretical Terms**

All theories contain concepts that are intended to either explain phenomena or be explained. Some concepts within a theory serve both functions. For each “oppositional tradition” theory, the original formulation of the theory will be scoured in order to provide definitions of key concepts. In some cases ambiguities or contradictions may be found when attempting to formulate definitions.

Conceptual definitions can also be easily confused with propositions (Gibbs 1972). For example, when Hirschi (1969) specifies that law is the product of value-consensus, it unclear if this is a definition or an assumption that can be false. In these cases, the definition will be stripped of its propositional component and the propositional

aspect will be respecified as a scope condition. While some may argue this takes away from the spirit of the theory, it is far better to have such an assumption converted into a scope condition that can potentially be relaxed than to leave it as an assumption which, if demonstrated to be false, undermines the entire theory.

### **Identifying Theoretical Propositions**

Theories will be closely examined in order to identify key propositions or knowledge claims. These propositions will be formally expressed in an analytical model that serves the dual function of expressing theoretical propositions and inventorying them. Additionally, knowledge claims will be stated in a propositional form that also specifies the necessary scope conditions in order to establish the conditional nature of particular theories.

### **Identifying Scope Conditions**

Key to the “oppositional tradition” is the presence of assumptions, with types of assumptions varying considerably. Some assumptions are used to hold constant processes viewed as exogenous to the theory. For example Sutherland (1940), argues that social disorganization leads to differential associations. Sutherland does not elaborate on differentiation dynamics within differential association theory, but rather takes these dynamics to be a given in order to formulate his theory. Unfortunately, the degree to which societies are differentiated varies tremendously and this could limit the explanatory power of differential association theory. Rather than call this an assumption, this will be treated as a scope condition when formalizing differential association theory. Other types of assumptions run the risk of being overly metaphysical. Assumptions of this kind tend to focus on human nature or the essence of the law, and run the risk of committing the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Human nature is neither that of unadulterated



self-interest nor perfect malleability. Insofar as a theory specifies a human nature is being assumed, this human nature will be treated as a scope condition that acknowledges underlying variation within the phenomena. Such assumptions should not be seen as a strength of a given theory, but rather they should be seen a limitation in the types of propositional statements it can make. This also holds true for conceptions of law. Control theory, for example, assumes law to be the product of value-consensus. As a result of this assumption, propositions within control theory are most likely to be upheld: (1) in societies where law is by and large the product of value consensus; or (2) for those acts which are legally proscribed on the bases of value-consensus. Lastly, levels of analysis will also be treated as scope conditions and theories will have their respective levels of analysis specified.

This process of formalization will hopefully shed a great deal of light on the underpinnings of criminological theory and possibilities for future elaboration and integration. One way in which this formalization effort can facilitate these possibilities is through the ability of formalized theory to be assessed utilizing theoretical, as well as empirical, criteria. The next section will discuss how the effort to evaluate these formalized theories will be undertaken. This will allow for concerns other than “explained variance” to play a role in theory evaluation.

### **Theory Evaluation**

Elliot, Ageton, and Cantor’s (1979) evaluation of theory based upon explained variance is but one way to assess the strength of a theory. But this method alone is of little use. In order for a purely empirical method to be effective, all theories being as-

sessed must be specified to explain the exact same phenomena under the exact same conditions. For example, if one theory is attempting to explain crime in a highly differentiated society, and another theory attempts to explain crime in a society with low levels of differentiation, then explained variance will not prove useful in assessing the theories because they are not attempting to explain the same thing under the same conditions. As a result of this problem, other criteria are required in order to evaluate criminological theory. Cohen (1989) identifies explanatory power to be important in assessing theories. Cohen defines explanatory power as follows:

“An explanans,  $E_1$ , is more powerful, than another explanans,  $E_2$ , if every explanandum for  $E_2$  is also an explanandum for  $E_1$  and at least one explanandum for  $E_1$  is *not* an explanandum for  $E_2$ ” (1989: 296; *italics* in original).

Explanatory power, then, is not simply explained variance, but also the number of different things the theory can explain. As a result, scope conditions are likely to highly limit the explanatory power of theories. Employing this criterion for the above example relating to differentiation and crime, a more powerful theory of crime would be a theory that accurately explains crime in a society *regardless* of levels of differentiation. The question of which theory offers a more powerful explanation rests on the degree to which it is being utilized in a manner consistent with its scope conditions, and how it compares to other theories that are explaining the same phenomena.

Evaluating theories in terms of theoretical explanatory power allows for not only the identification of which theory or theories have the greatest amount of explanatory power, but also allows for the identification of those areas where theories could be elaborated in order to increase explanatory power or be integrated on the basis of non-contradicting assumptions.

In utilizing explanatory power as a criteria for theory evaluation, one could also evaluate a theory in terms of its testability, accuracy, range, intensity, or discrimination (Gibbs 1972). These criteria are of little use for the current formalization effort for several reasons. First, all theories have been demonstrated to be testable. Second, accuracy is a problematic criterion when evaluating these theories because empirical tests of the theories have failed to rigorously apply scope conditions when assessing the theories and the failure to do so can dramatically affect the accuracy of a theory's predictions. Third, as all theories to be formalized are specified at the microlevel, all theories contain the same range (the number of different units of analysis to which the theory applies) since their explanations do not extend beyond the individual level of analysis. Fourth, all formalized theories fail to make statements pertaining to whether a particular *explanans* is a better or worse predictor of an explanandum than other explanans within the theory. Because of this omission, all theories fail to discriminate between the explanatory power of particular *explanans*. As a result of these evaluative dimensions of explanatory power being constants across all theories, they will not be employed when evaluating the formalized theories.

Several non-explanatory power evaluation criteria will also not be employed in this formalization effort. Gibbs (1972) notes that parsimony, logical consistency, and plausibility all serve as methods of evaluating theory; however, no consensus exists in sociology pertaining to their application when evaluating theory. Criteria pertaining to parsimony and plausibility will not be employed as a result of a lack of consensus surrounding their use. Unlike parsimony and plausibility, logical consistency has been an area of focus among the theories to be formalized. While oppositional tradition theories have been seen as tending towards logical consistency, integrative theories have largely been seen as logically inconsistent (Hirschi 1989). Since the theories being formalized are derived from the oppositional tradition, they overall tend to be logically consistent.

The only theory that demonstrates significant logical problems is general strain theory. When formalizing this theory, potential logical inconsistencies will be identified and will serve as a basis for evaluating the theory.

### **Conclusion**

The intent of the proposed dissertation is to aid in the development of cumulative theory in criminology by formalizing the “oppositional tradition” theories that were at the heart of the integration/elaboration debate. The intent is not to arrive at a conclusion that any particular theory is intrinsically better than another, but rather to specify under which conditions a given theory should be expected to perform more consistently than other theories, and to indicate opportunities for theoretical growth by proposing directions for elaboration or integration. It is entirely possible that Gibbs is correct and there may be no accolades for such an effort. Regardless, it is important to do so for no other reason than it remains an untapped source for cumulative theory development in criminology. Such an effort could not only have a bearing on those theories that are to be formalized, but it could also have implications for those theories which have sought to elaborate upon these traditions.

Working towards these ends, the dissertation will be organized into several chapters that formalize particular theories, and one chapter that evaluates the formalized theories in terms of theoretical explanatory power. Chapter 2 will provide a formalization of differential association theory (Sutherland 1947; Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill 1992). In formalizing differential association theory, it will be necessary to investigate its intellectual history in order to define key theoretical concepts and clarify the theory’s assumptions of human nature. Chapter 3 will formalize social learning theory (Akers 1985, 2009; Burgess and Akers 1966). As an elaboration of differential association theory under principles of operant conditioning and behavioral modeling, social learning theory is

very similar to differential association theory in many respects. Despite numerous similarities with differential association theory, it also differs in several key ways which will be discussed. In Chapter 4, a formalization of social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2004) will be proposed. Social control theory will differ from differential association and social learning theories in terms of its emphasis on only those factors that limit one's engagement in criminal behavior. Chapter 6 will formalize general strain theory (Agnew 1992; 2004). As a microlevel elaboration of anomie or strain theories (e.g., Cloward and Olin 1960; Cohen 1955; Merton 1968), general strain theory specifies the microlevel forces that moderate the likelihood that strains (goal blockages, exposure to aversive stimuli, or loss of something positively valued) will result in criminal behavior. Chapter 7 will evaluate the formalized theories in terms of limitations of explanatory power that are the result of a theory's scope conditions, propositions, or *explanandum*. Chapter 8 will conclude the dissertation by discussing the issue of integration within criminological theory.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Cohen (1989) does discuss how one could use mathematical tools and symbolic logic to deduce additional knowledge claims from theories; however, it is not necessary to the formalization process.

<sup>2</sup> While Hirschi ([1969] 2005) argues that his definition of law is borrowed from Durkheim, Durkheim did not see law as static. For Durkheim ([1933] 1984), law was variable and the degree to which law reflected value-consensus was a function of a society's level of differentiation.

## Chapter 2

### Differential Association Theory

In many ways differential association theory is the criminological theory best suited for formalization. Unlike other criminological theories that have emphasized substantive issues and eschewed a formal mode of expression, in formulating differential association Sutherland acknowledged the cumulative nature of scientific theory and was more deliberate in his approach to theory construction. This notion of science is present in several of his writings (Sutherland [1932] 1956a, [1932] 1956b, [1942] 1956), but is most articulated in his response to the Michael-Adler report criticism that criminology was too empirical (Sutherland [1932] 1956a). Here, Sutherland responds by noting that although concepts in new sciences may be too empirical, as research is undertaken concepts become more abstract<sup>1</sup> and are further developed in light of new findings. For Sutherland, criminology was nascent science and as such an emphasis on empirical phenomenon was important, but should ultimately lead to conceptual developments. This view is not without its shortcomings, but of particular importance to this effort to formalize differential association is that as a result of this philosophy differential association theory is spread across a wide array of publications, is partly left to inference, and is overall incomplete (Vold 1951).

In light of these challenges, it is important to emphasize several aspects of the formalization process as it specifically relates to differential association theory. First, it is important to formalize the theory by relying on a array of Sutherland's writings that will be integrated into a more cohesive statement of the theory. In some cases some creative interpolation may be required, but in doing so all efforts will be made to maintain the integrity of the theory. Second, while differential association theory is Sutherland's most well known thesis on criminality, his theory of differential social organization was crucial

to his overall theory of crime even though it was far less developed (Matsueda 1988). This is especially germane because in many ways differential association theory does not make complete sense without understanding how associations relate to social organization. Despite the relationship between differential social organization and differential association, it is beyond the scope of this formalization to attempt to articulate Sutherland's macrolevel theory. Instead, differential social organization will be discussed as a scope condition relevant to differential association theory.

In working towards these ends of formalization, the chapter will be organized into several sections. The first section will provide an overview of differential association theory and be followed by a second section which elaborates the theory's assumptions of human nature. Next, a restatement of the theory will be proposed which includes a formal model, an elaboration of theoretical concepts, and the specification of theoretical scope conditions. The final section will outline basic assumptions, conceptual definitions, proposition, and scope conditions present within the theory.

### **Theoretical Overview**

Despite other efforts to elaborate differential association theory (e.g., Adams 1973; Akers 1985, 2009; Burgess and Akers 1966; Glaser 1960; Jeffery 1966), and a previous effort to convert its statements into set theory (DeFleur and Quinney 1966), differential association theory remains a distinct theory unto itself which has not changed since Sutherland's final statement of the theory prior to his death. The final statement of the theory presented a learning theory of crime which contained nine propositions (Sutherland 1947: 6-7):

1. *Criminal behavior is learned.*
2. *Criminal Behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.*

3. *The principle part of the learning of criminal behavior is occurs within intimate personal groups.*
4. *When a criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple; (b) the specific directions of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes.*
5. *The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of legal codes as favorable or unfavorable.*
6. *A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law*
7. *Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.*
8. *The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any learning.*
9. *Though criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is explained by those general needs and values since non-criminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values.*

In stating differential association theory, Sutherland (1947) specifies an etiological theory of crime which sees crime as being the result of the definitions of the situation one learns throughout his or her life which are favorable to the violation of criminal laws; whereas the definition of the situation to which one is exposed is contingent upon the social organization of values within one's environment and an individual's interactions with them. Within the theory, a crime only in those situations in which an individual has an excess of definitions of the situation favorable to law violation and an opportunity to commit a crime is present.

### **Assumptions of Human Nature**

The assumptions of human nature contained within differential association theory are perhaps the most misinterpreted aspects of the theory. This is largely a result Ko-



rnhauser's (1978) critique of theories of delinquency and the utilization of her critique against cultural deviance theories by Hirschi (Hirschi 1979, 1989) to argue that, as a result of logically inconsistent assumptions of human nature, the integration of criminological theories is not possible. This argument rests upon Kornhauser's (1978) assertion that differential association assumes human nature to be *tabula rasa* and that society perfectly imprints individuals with the culture of the group.

A large part of this misinterpretation of differential association theory is a result of Sutherland's failure to clearly articulate the connection between differential association theory and the symbolic interactionism of Thomas (1966; [1923] 1967) and Thomas and Znaniecki ([1927] 1966a, [1927] 1966b). Sutherland ([1942] 1956), as well as others (e.g., Gaylord and Galliher 1990; Schuessler 1973) have noted the presence of this connection; however, this connection has never been articulated beyond a discussion of intellectual influences when in fact differential association can be seen as an application of this social psychological perspective to criminal behavior. This connection is particularly evident in differential association theory's fourth, fifth, sixth, and ninth propositions. Here, Sutherland (1947) argues: (1) that it is the *direction* of drives, motives, and attitudes that are learned; (2) the specific direction pertains to whether the definitions learned are *favorable or unfavorable* to the legal code; (3) criminal behavior is the result of an *excess* of criminal definitions; and (4) that criminal behaviors are not *reducible* to either general needs or values.

In order to clarify the assumptions of human nature contained within differential association theory, human nature as conceived within the theory will be discussed in terms of its biological foundations, its plasticity, and its emergence as a result of biological and social forces.

## Biological Foundations

Motivations, drives, and attitudes were all crucial elements in the social psychology of Thomas (1966; [1923] 1967) and Thomas and Znaniecki ([1927] 1966a, [1927] 1966b), which acknowledged biology as an influence on human behavior. According to Thomas's ([1923] 1967) notion of the four wishes, human behavior contained four basic motivations which originated in human biology and the salience of a wish varied from individual to individual. These wishes included the need for new experience, the desire for security, the desire for response (approval from others), and the desire for recognition (status). Additionally, humans possessed innate drives, such as those related to hunger or reproduction (Thomas [1923] 1967; Thomas and Znaniecki [1927] 1966a, [1927] 1966b). These innate drives were seen as amoral in nature, as a given drive could be realized in both socially approved and deviant ways. Thomas ([1923] 1967), for example, observes:

“The moral good or evil of a wish depends on the social meaning or value of the activity which results from it. Thus the vagabond, the adventurer, the spendthrift, the bohemian are dominated by the desire for new experience, but so are the inventor and the scientist...” (28).

As a result of the possibility a drive might be manifested behaviorally in morally distinct ways, such drives or motivations were seen as having limited explanatory power in regards to explaining human behavior.

Within this perspective, drives and motives are part of a more general class of behavioral predispositions called *natural attitudes* (Thomas and Znaniecki [1927] 1966a).<sup>2</sup> Under this view, natural attitudes serve as the basis of all behavioral motivations and are fundamentally instinctive, hedonistic, and tend to be pursued in the most efficient way possible. Natural attitudes are not organized in meaningful ways and may be suppressed by other natural attitudes, push other natural attitudes aside in order to be expressed, or

simply not be expressed at all. Additionally, when two natural attitudes are expressed concurrently it is the result of habit, not social organization. Thus, one's desire to reproduce may be displaced by hunger, but there is no innate predisposition to combine a meal and the drive to reproduce into a *date*.

Since all natural attitudes have biological origins, the content one learns through interactions with others is *not* the motivation or drive itself, but rather the social meaning attached to the act. These meanings are contingent upon how one's group regulates the wishes (Thomas [1923] 1967) and this process of sublimation is part of a more general process in which all biological predispositions are potentially subject to social control. The process of social regulation results in the transformation of *natural attitudes* into socially conditioned *cultural attitudes* (Thomas and Znaniecki [1927] 1966a, [1927] 1966b) and demonstrates that human behavior is seen as being plastic within the theory.

### **Plasticity**

The sublimation of natural attitudes into socially desirable predispositions represents the transformation of natural attitudes into *cultural attitudes*<sup>3</sup> (ibid). Neither cultural nor natural attitudes can be reduced to one another, and cultural attitudes represent an emergent property which is result of the interaction of a particular social environment on preexisting natural attitudes. Cultural attitudes differ from natural attitudes in several key ways. First, cultural attitudes tend to be organized and as a result social events or situations may link a wide array of human needs into being realized at one time. Second, cultural attitudes tend to be reflective, remembered, and repeated. Third, cultural attitudes allow for the more permanent subordination of other attitudes than is possible with natural attitudes, which are more susceptible to impulsivity. Individuals suppress natural attitudes on a daily basis as they hold off from eating until specific mealtimes, or use the lavatory in lieu of relieving themselves wherever they so choose. Fourth, just as natural

attitudes are biological in nature, cultural attitudes are social in nature and depend upon the social environments to which one has been exposed. Lastly, cultural attitudes can become relatively fixed overtime and as a result an individual may have a difficult time acquiring new cultural attitudes.

The process in which a natural attitude becomes socially molded into cultural attitude requires both an individual to act upon a natural attitude and for there to be value within the social environment which corresponds to the attitude in question (e.g., thirst and soy milk). Thomas ([1923] 1967) defines the term value broadly as either being a stimulus or "...any object, real or imaginary, which has meaning and may be the object of an activity" (233). This molding process involves one's group engaging in social control efforts to bring the natural attitudes of an individual in line with the social values of a group (Thomas [1923] 1967: Chapter 8). Thus, whereas an attitude is a property of an individual, a value is a property of a group.

A definition of the situation is *both* a cultural attitude and value. At the individual level, definitions of the situation are cultural attitudes that determine actions in both habitual and contemplative ways. They can be habitual when a particular environment is relatively static and the outcomes of behaviors are relatively determined by circumstance (ibid). They can also be deliberative as a result of situational uncertainty as to which behaviors are appropriate depending on the circumstances at hand (Thomas 1966). Under such situations, individuals actively interpret meanings within the environment prior to acting. At the social level, definitions of the situation exist as social values that serve as behavioral stimuli which not only can evoke cultural attitudes, but also specify which methods of acting upon a stimuli are appropriate (Thomas [1923] 1967).

The ability to shape natural attitudes in accordance with the rules and regulations present within a group's social values reflects an underlying assumption in differential association theory that human behavior is plastic. But since all behaviors have their origins

in natural attitudes, human nature is not assumed to be *tabula rasa* within differential association theory.

### **Emergence**

The underlying assumption of human nature contained within differential association is that an individual's human nature is a result of the interplay between biological and social forces. Since natural attitudes can be realized in both moral and amoral ways, the presence of a drive alone is insufficient when attempting to explain a particular behavioral outcome. But just as the explanation of a behavior cannot be reduced to a drive or motivation, it can also not be reduced to the social values of a group (Sutherland 1947). This is because individuals who are exposed to a particular value may differ in terms of their natural attitudes (Sutherland 1947; Thomas [1923] 1967; Thomas and Znaniecki [1927] 1966a; [1927] 1966b). Thus, a criminal behavior within differential association theory is neither explainable by a give natural attitude nor it is explainable by a particular social value. Instead, in order to explain human behaviors, relevant natural attitudes and social values must be examined as cultural attitudes - that is, as emergent phenomena not reducible to either biological drives or social values.

In summary, differential association makes three assumptions about human nature. First, human nature is built upon a biological foundation. This foundation contains basic needs and drives which serve as the basis of all human activity and motivation. Differential association theory also acknowledges that these biological foundations are variable in that within a given situation the salience of particular drives or wishes vary, and that these natural attitudes also vary between individuals. Second, human nature is plastic and is shaped by the social environment to which one is exposed. While human nature

is plastic, it is *not* a blank slate because innate biological drives exist independent of any learning process. Third, *human nature* is an emergent property of biological and social forces, and it is irreducible to either force. Biological drives and values alone are both insufficient when attempting to explain human behavior.

### **Theoretical Restatement**

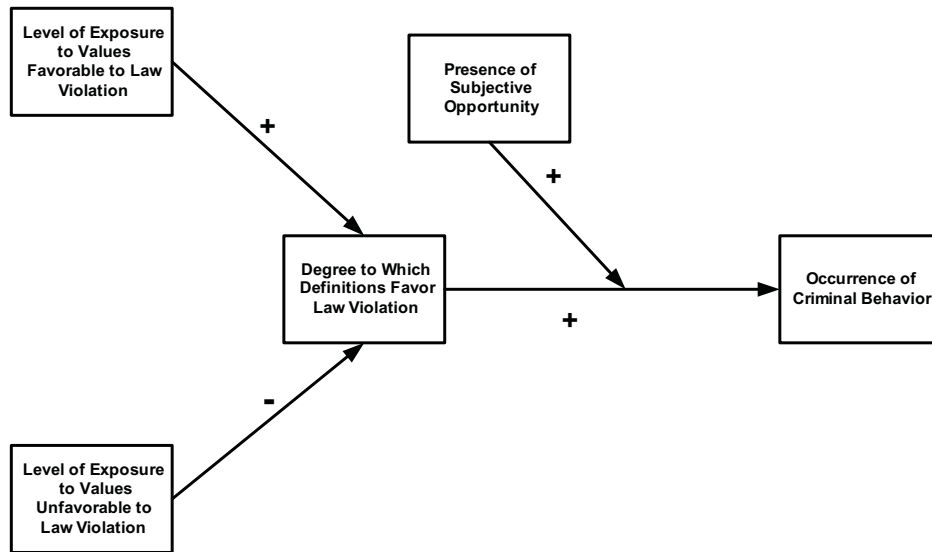
A major criticism of differential association theory has been its failure to clearly articulate the meaning of theoretical concepts (Cressey 1960b; Short 1960). Utilizing the previous discussion on the theory's assumptions of human nature, it is possible to more clearly define key theoretical concepts within differential association theory in order to arrive at a more clear statement of the theory. Figure 2.1 displays the causal relationships proposed by differential association theory (Sutherland 1947). The theory posits that criminal behavior occurs when an individual encounters the subjective opportunity to engage in criminal behavior and has learned an excess of definitions of the situation favorable to criminal behavior, compared to definitions unfavorable, as a result of being exposed to definitions favorable to criminal behavior.

### **Exposure to Patterns of Values**

Differential association theory proposes that individuals learn the techniques for engaging in criminal behaviors and the "specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes" through interactions with criminal and anti-criminal patterns (Sutherland 1947: 6). There has been much confusion surrounding this component of differential association theory on two grounds.

First, it is unclear what Sutherland meant when he specified it is the *direction* of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes that are learned (see Akers 2009). While Sutherland did not define these terms, the previous discussion of Sutherland's intellec-

**Figure 2.1**  
**Differential Association Theory**



tual influences can possibly elucidate the theory's meaning in this regard. As previously discussed, Thomas and Znaniecki ( [1927] 1966a; [1927] 1966b) distinguish between natural and cultural attitudes. Whereas natural attitudes reflect the basic biological drives of an organism and serve as the basis of all human motivation, they are indeterminate in terms of predicting deviant behavior because the behaviors one might engage in as a response to a particular drive can be either deviant or conforming depending upon the values of one's group. Thus, aggression can either lead one to commit assault, or it could lead an individual to play football. Both activities represent actions that are motivated by aggression, but they differ in terms of their legal status. And while Thomas and Znaniecki do not discuss rationalizations, a rationalization could likewise justify a criminal or noncriminal act. Differential association theory's conception that directions are learned indicates Sutherland's use of the term attitudes is synonymous with Thomas

and Znaniecki's concept of natural attitudes and therefore the terms attitudes, drives, and motivations in the theory's fourth proposition are redundant.

A second area of confusion surrounds whether differential association theory posits an individual engages in criminal behavior as a result of associating with criminal others (see Cressey 1960b). Differential association theory's second proposition states individuals learn criminal behaviors from others through a process of communication (Sutherland 1947), but it is not the associate *per se* that causes an individual to commit a crime, rather it is the pattern of the content of the value communicated. In response to criticism of the theory surrounding whether associations cause an individual to engage in criminal behavior, Cressey (1960b) notes that it is one's associations with patterns of criminal behavior that are important in learning to engage in criminal behavior. It is therefore not one's associations that causes one to engage in criminal behavior, but rather the content communicated through one's associations. Cressey (1960b) further clarifies this point when stating:

“Thus, if a mother teaches her son that ‘Honesty is the best policy’ but also teaches him, perhaps inadvertently, that ‘It is all right to steal a loaf of bread when you are starving,’ she is presenting him with an anti-criminal behavior pattern and a criminal behavior pattern, even if she herself is honest, noncriminal, and even anti-criminal. One can learn criminal behavior patterns from persons who are not criminals, and one can learn anti-criminal behavior patterns from hoods, professional crooks, habitual offenders, and gangsters” (49).

In light of differential association theory's connection to the social psychology of Thomas and Znaniecki, and Cressey's further clarification and reiteration that it is the content of the patterns one is exposed to that matters, it is possible to more clearly articulate how an individual learns to engage in criminal behavior. An individual learns to engage in criminal behavior as a result of being exposed to *values* that convey to an



actor the objects to which he or she can orient his or her behavior in relation to a specific natural attitude, and how one should act in response to a given value. Values are therefore real or imaginary stimuli that orient his or her behavior (Thomas [1923] 1967); and skills are a subcategory of values that represent the specific behaviors one should engage in as a response to a particular stimulus (or value). Values therefore represent objects to one can orient his or her behavior (e.g., the direction for natural motives, drives, attitudes), while skills are a special kind of value that specify the actual actions one should engage in response to a particular stimulus. In the example provided by Cressey, starvation represents the natural attitude of hunger, bread represent the social object to which one has learned to direct his or her hunger, and stealing represents the skills or actual behaviors one should engage in to satisfy his or her hunger.

Before explaining how one's exposure to criminal or anti-criminal patterns vary, it is important to clarify that values and definitions of the situations are synonymous terms. Within the social psychology of Thomas and Znaniecki ([1927] 1966a; [1927] 1966b), the actions of others are perceived by an individual as values that provide definitions of the situation on how to behave under similar conditions. These definitions of the situation of a groups can be seen as rules or schemes of action that specify how individuals are to act in specific situations or across situations (Thomas [1923] 1967; Thomas and Znaniecki [1927] 1966a) . But since these definitions of the situation are external to the actor when being observed in the actions of others, they are perceived as social objects and therefore they are a property of the external actor or group that the actor represents. As the socialization process entails conveying to new member of a group the appropriate definitions of the situation held by that group (Thomas [1923] 1967), the definitions of the situation one is exposed to are in fact the values of the group. Since an individual can also possess definitions of the situation in the form of cultural attitudes, the dual existence

of definitions of the situation can create confusion within the theory. As a result of this possibility, the term values will serve a substitute for the term definitions of the situation when discussing definitions of the situation that are external to an actor.

Differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) specifies that individuals learn criminal or anti-criminal definitions of the situation (directions of motives and skills) because of exposure to patterns of values that vary by frequency, duration, priority, and intensity. This learning process can related to direct interactions with others or can also relate to exposure to values that are present in the media.

### *Frequency and Duration*

Sutherland (1947) states that the definitions of frequency and duration “as modalities of associations [that] are obvious and need no explanation ” (7). While the frequency and duration of interactions with criminal values increases the likelihood of learning criminal definitions, another aspect of frequency and duration is the role of isolation and value-neutral activities on limiting one’s exposure to various values (ibid.). Isolation occurs because of anomic organization within a community and the absence of agents of social control who would ordinarily convey definitions unfavorable to law violations. While it is also possible to be isolated from values favorable to law violation, Sutherland does not highlight this possibility and instead isolation is discussed in terms of one’s isolation from anti-criminal values. Effective social control efforts would seek to isolate individuals from such values. The concept of isolation, thus, solely relates to one’s exposure to values unfavorable to law violation within differential association theory.

Value-neutral activities are those activities that do not directly relate to the law, but are important because they occupy the time of individuals and lower their exposure to criminal definitions (Sutherland 1947). This relationship is complex in that value-neutral

activities can provide exposure to criminal definitions in anomic communities. As previously noted youth clubs in disorganized communities may actually bring delinquents into contact with one another and facilitate the exchange of criminal definitions of the situation (Sutherland [1936] 1956). As a result of this possibility, value-neutral activities are important only insofar as they are truly value-neutral.

### *Priority*

Priority represents a developmental component of differential association theory. According to the theory, behaviors acquired in childhood are possibly more persistent than behaviors acquired later in life (Sutherland 1947). Priority may also be important for reasons other than those cited by Sutherland. Under the social psychological tradition on which differential association theory is based, the cultural attitudes one acquires throughout life as a result of exposure to values not only predispose individuals to certain courses of actions, but they also preclude other lines of behaviors (Thomas and Znaniecki [1927] 1966a). As these attitudes become more fixed overtime into one's personality, not only are behaviors associated with these attitudes more durable, but it becomes difficult to learn new behaviors which are incompatible with an individual's previously organized attitudes (ibid.).

### *Intensity*

Whereas priority refers to the developmental state of an individual, and frequency and duration refer to the temporal aspects of an interaction with a particular meaning, intensity refers to the nature of the interaction itself. Sutherland (1947) does not clearly define intensity, but does suggest it relates to the emotional connection an individual has to the source of a value, or the source's level of prestige. This notion of intensity is reflected in the theory's third proposition where Sutherland specifies that most learning

occurs within intimate personal groups and notes the relative weakness of newspapers or other media sources in influencing behavior.

### **Definitions of the Situation**

As a result of one's exposure to criminal and anti-criminal values that vary in frequency, intensity, duration, and priority, an individual learns definitions of the situation that are either favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior (Sutherland 1947). These definitions of the situation include the skills necessary to commit a crime, along with the directions of motives, drives, attitudes, and rationalizations (ibid).

At the individual level, the term definitions of the situation are synonymous with the concept of cultural attitudes that has been previously discussed. As cultural attitudes, definitions of the situation afford an individual the ability to recognize those objects within the environment to which he or she can orient his or her behavior in response to natural attitudes, and specify which actions an individual should engage in response to a specific object. Differential association theory captures this notion that one learns to recognize objects as something to which one can orient her or her behavior when it specifies that the direction of motives, drives, and attitudes are learned (Sutherland 1947). The previous example from Cressey illustrates this point. Differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) also specifies that individuals learn the skills or behaviors required to engage in criminal behaviors. While skills or criminal behaviors can be simple or complex, they must be learned and can not be the result of behavioral innovation (Sutherland 1947). This will be further discussed as a scope condition of the theory.

In addition to learning skills and the direction of natural attitudes, individuals also learn rationalizations or neutralizations that allow an individual to engage in criminal behavior despite having definitions of the situation opposite to it. Sutherland (1947) never clearly defines rationalizations, and the concept is most elaborated by Cressey

(1952) and Sykes and Matza (1957). While Cressey (1952) suggests a potential meaning when discussing how white-collar criminals might rationalize a theft as borrowing in order to reconcile their self-concept with their criminal behavior, Sykes and Matza (1957) elaborate this concept more specifically in relation to criminal behavior by noting how individuals deny responsibility for action, deny victims are harmed, claim victimization is the result of *just deserts*, condemn the condemners, or appeal to higher loyalties when justifying their actions. Such *neutralizations* reflect individuals who are actively manipulating specific elements of a crime, that is, elements of a situation, in order to justify a particular course of action. By claiming a person deserves to be assaulted, an offender can manipulate the definition of the situation in order to follow through with the criminal assault. Thus, a particular drive or motive can gain expression within a situation when an actor redefines the situation in terms of alternate values even if the original definition of the situation did not call for, or even prohibited, a particular course of action.

While the concept of neutralizations provides a crucial elaboration to differential association theory, it also raises questions with Sutherland's (1947) contention that behaviors are not innovated. In Sykes and Matza (1957), neutralizations served as innovations pertaining to how one classifies an act in order to resolve the discrepancy between an individual's law-abiding self-concept and his or her criminal-behavior. In Cressey's (1952) study of violations of financial trust, it was not embezzlement behaviors that were innovated, but rather it was the reclassification of theft as "borrowing" or conceiving crimes as conventional behaviors. Ironically, individuals learned how to embezzle funds when learning how to audit accounts and detect embezzlement.

Unlike Cressey's work on verbalizations that saw neutralizations as existing prior to a criminal act, Sykes and Matza (1957) observe neutralizations as initially following criminal behavior, but subsequently serving to enable it. According to neutralization

theory, neutralizations initially serve to ameliorate the negative emotions an individual feels after engaging in a behavior he or she believes to be wrong. The neutralizations one employs to mitigate negative emotions represent extra-legal applications of legally recognized “defenses for crimes” that remove an individual from culpability. Once an individual develops a neutralization for a given act, it frees the individual from subsequent social controls and serves as a definition favorable to criminal behavior.

Summarizing the concepts of definitions, definitions represent the cultural attitudes *an individual* has learned as a result of being exposed to values. These cultural attitudes represent the definitions of the situation an individual possesses that contain knowledge of: (1) the types of values to one can orient his or her behaviors; (2) the behaviors one can employ in response to a given value; and (3) the neutralizations that are necessary to reclassify an act in order enable a criminal act to be justified despite the individual possessing cultural attitudes or definitions of the situation that would ordinarily oppose such an act. Differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) further proposes that that one must have a surplus of definitions favorable to criminal behavior compared to definitions against it in order to engage in criminal behavior.

### **Presence of Subjective Opportunity**

According to differential association theory (Sutherland 1947), an individual will engage in criminal behavior if and only if an individual possesses an excess of definitions favorable to criminal behavior and he or she has the subjective opportunity to engage in criminal behavior. Contrary to other opportunity theories (e.g., Cohen and Felson 1979) differential association theory posits it is the presence of subjective opportunity, not objective opportunity, that leads an individual to engage in criminal behavior. Since differential association theory holds that an individual learns the direction of natural attitudes, the presence of an objective opportunity is insufficient to produce criminal behavior be-

cause an individual may not have come to subjectively view that opportunity as an object to orient his or here action. Cressey (1960b) illustrates this point when observing:

“...one person who walks by an unguarded and open cash register, or who is informed of the presence of such a condition in a nearby store, may perceive the situation as a “crime committing” one, while another person in the identical circumstances may perceive the situation as one in which the owner should be warned against carelessness” (52).

Thus, depending upon the values to which one was exposed, and the definitions or cultural attitudes one has as a result of the exposure to particular values, two individuals may subjectively perceive an objective opportunity in very different ways. For this reason, differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) sees definitions as being a necessary condition for criminal behavior, while subjective opportunity is only a sufficient cause of criminal behavior.

## **Crime**

As criminal laws exist external to the actor, crime can be viewed as a politically important value (Sutherland 1947: 19) to which one can orient his or her behavior. Differential association theory therefore contains a legalistic definition of crime in which for a behavior to be considered a crime it must be legally prohibited within the criminal code (Sutherland 1947, 1983).

## **Scope Conditions**

Within differential association theory there are several scope conditions which limit the theory’s explanatory power.<sup>4</sup> These relate to the theory’s inability to account

for: (1) behavioral innovations and crime; (2) the learning process; (3) particular personal networks; and (4) why certain values are codified within the criminal law.

### **Behavioral Innovation**

Sutherland (1947) was clear in his assertion that criminal behaviors were not invented; however, he did acknowledge that with social psychological theory there is the possibility of innovation (Sutherland [1942] 1956). For Sutherland, the first instance of a crime was the result of changes in the legal code and not behaviors (ibid.). As has been previously noted, neutralizations are a particular point of contention in regards to innovation since neutralizations reflect individuals manipulating meanings in order to innovate behavioral outcomes. This conception of innovation is compatible with the cognitive psychological view on the subject that sees behavioral innovations as pertaining to the use of analogies or metaphors within novel situations (e.g., Holyoak and Nisbett 1988). Since neutralizations entail the application of legal defenses for crimes to extralegal situations, these neutralizations could be viewed as being analogous to their legal counterparts and as a result allow for definitional innovation. Despite this possibility, Sutherland (1947) explicitly states that *behavioral* innovations do not occur and therefore criminal behavioral innovations, that is, innovations that pertain to behaviors that have never been observed in *any* context, are beyond the scope of the theory.

### **The Learning Process**

A criticism of differential association theory is that it fails to specify the actual learning process (see Burgess and Akers 1966). While the theory's modalities of interaction and communication (frequency, duration, intensity, and priority) specify the nature of an interaction with patterns of criminal or non-criminal values, the theory does not



specify the actual mechanism involved in the learning process. As such, the mechanisms of learning are beyond the scope of the theory.

### **Personal Networks**

Sutherland (1947) acknowledges the differential association theory does not specify why a particular individual has a particular set of social network. While Sutherland does propose that the differential social organization of communities potentially influences the definitions to which one is exposed, this macrolevel perspective does not predict one's actual exposure to these definitions. Sutherland acknowledged that even in areas with high rates of deviance one could find non-delinquent youth. As such, the reason why an individual has a particular set of associations is beyond the scope of differential association theory.

### **Existence of a Criminal Law**

Differential association theory does not specify how behaviors become defined as criminal. While Sutherland (1983, [1929] 1956) does suggest criminal laws are the product of social conflict in which groups seek to legally proscribe the behaviors of others failing to conform to group values, and that some groups may be more influential than others in shaping laws, this process is not well defined and as a result is beyond the scope of the theory.

### **Conclusion**

Sutherland was cautious in terms of theory construction for fear that the premature development of scientific concepts could actually impede the development of scientific knowledge and therefore saw differential association theory as a work-in-progress. The discussion of differential association theory presented in this chapter should be seen in the

same way. The purpose of this formalization effort was to attempt to clarify differential association theory in terms of its conceptual meanings, assumptions of human nature, hypothesized relationships, and theoretical limitations in order to allow for future efforts to develop the theory either through theoretical integration or elaboration. As such, this chapter should not be seen as an attempt to produce a definitive statement of the theory.

In addition to the formalization effort already presented, a restatement of differential association theory follows which attempts to more clearly state the theory in terms of assumptions, conceptual definitions, propositions, and scope conditions.

### **Theoretical Restatement**

#### *Assumptions*

- A1. Biological drives serve as the basis of all human behavior
- A2. Human behavior is plastic
- A3. Human nature is an emergent property of biological drives, human plasticity, and the social environment to which one is exposed

#### *Conceptual Definitions*

- D1. *Definition of the Situation* – a Cultural attitude which specifies in a given situation the social objects which can serve as a behavioral stimulus (the directions of motives, drives, attitudes, or rationalization), along with the courses of action one should take in response to the stimulus (e.g., skills).
- D2. *Exposure to Values* – An individual's exposure to that are favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior that vary in frequency, duration, intensity, and priority.
  - A. *Values* - The real or imaginary stimuli that are *external* to an actor that orient his or her behavior towards an object and specify the skills or behaviors one should engage in as a response to a particular stimuli.
  - B. *Criminal values* – Values that define a criminal behavior as being an appropriate responses to a particular stimulus.

- C. *Anti-criminal values* – Values that define criminal behavior as not being appropriate response to a particular stimulus.
- D3. *Subjective Opportunity* – The presence of an value in the environment to which an individual possesses a corresponding definition of the situation.
- D4. *Crime* – a value that is legally defined as being criminal.

*Knowledge Claims*

- P1. The degree to which an individual possesses definitions of the situation favorable to law violation is:
  - A. A positive function of the individual's exposure to criminal values.
  - B. A Negative function of the individual's exposure to anti-criminal values.
- P2. The occurrence of a criminal act positive multiplicative function of:
  - A. The presence of an excess of definitions in favor of law violation, and
  - B. The presence of a subjective opportunity to commit a crime.

*Scope Conditions*

- SC1. The dynamics leading to the classification of an act as criminal is beyond the scope of differential association theory.
- SC2. Crime in undifferentiated societies is beyond the scope of differential association theory.
- SC3. The dynamics which lead a person to have a particular set of associations are beyond the scope of differential association theory.
- SC4. Criminal behaviors that are the result of behavioral innovations that are not learned from others are outside the scope of differential association theory.

SC5. The precise mechanisms of learning are beyond the scope differential association theory.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Sutherland (1932] 1956c) further elaborates upon this point when discussing Cooley's notion that behavior can be abstracted from actions in social processes.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas and Znaniecki ([1927] 1966a) also use the term temperamental attitudes to refer to natural attitudes.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas and Znaniecki ([1927] 1966b) also use the term character to refer to natural cultural attitudes.

<sup>4</sup> Another possible scope condition pertains to differential association theory's ability to explain the relationship between personality and crime (see Cressey 1960b). While statements of differential association theory (Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill 1992) that have been made after Sutherland's death acknowledge the theory's inability to account for personality characteristics and crime, Sutherland ([1942] 1956) contends that even if an individual were to possess a personality trait conducive to criminal behavior it would ultimately be directed along particular course of action depending upon the definition of the situation the person was exposed to in the environment.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Social Learning Theory**

The development of social learning theory represents a significant elaboration of differential association theory. By the early 1960s, differential association theory was seen as being deficient for its failure to specify how individuals actually learn criminal behavior (Burgess and Akers 1966; Cressey 1960b). While specific modalities of interaction (frequency, duration, intensity, and priority) specified those dimensions of interaction which were seen as being relevant to the learning of definitions favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior, the learning process itself remained undeveloped. Although Jeffery (1966) first suggested that differential association theory could be further developed by incorporating principles from operant conditioning theory, Jeffery only suggested this connection and never set forth to restate differential association theory under behaviorist principles (Akers 2009; Burgess and Akers 1966). Burgess and Akers (1966) proposed such a synthesis of differential association and operant conditioning theories; and this newly formed differential-association/differential-reinforcement theory of criminal behavior restated differential association theory in terms of behavioral principles relating to operant conditioning, which held that behavior was learned as a result of punishments or rewards associated with particular behaviors in response to particular stimuli.

This integration was not without its critics. Criticisms of the theory emphasized that the mentalistic concepts of attitudes or definitions were fundamentally incompatible with the with the empiricism of behaviorism that denied the use of mental constructs (Adams 1973; Halbasch 1979; Jeffery 1980). While differential-association/differential-reinforcement theory was met by its fair share of criticism, the theory would not remain static and developments would occur which overtime brought the theory more in line with

the symbolic interactionism of differential association theory (Akers 2009). As Akers (1985, 2009) began to incorporate ideas from psychological social learning theory (e.g., Bandura 1977), such as vicarious learning and self regulation into the theory, the cognitive components associated with criminal behavior again became a point of emphasis and the theory became increasingly referred to as “social learning theory” (Akers 2009).

With these developments in mind, this formalization will rely upon the most recent statement of social learning theory, which is seen as being its most definitive statement (Akers 2009). As this formalization will focus on social learning theory, no attention will be paid to the outdated earlier statements of the theory which have served as the target of theoretical criticisms. These early statements of the theory will be incorporated within the formalization only insofar as they are present in the most recent statement of the theory. This formalization will proceed by identifying social learning theory’s assumptions of human nature, core theoretical concepts, key theoretical relationships, and theoretical scope conditions.

### **Assumptions of Human Nature**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, cultural deviance theories have been criticized for purportedly assuming human nature to be a *tabula rasa*. While it was demonstrated that such an assumption was not present in regard to differential association theory, the accuracy of this criticism in regard to social learning theory remains open to debate. Akers (1996, 2009) has explicitly sought to address the cultural deviance critique (Hirschi [1969] 2005; Kornhauser 1978); however, his response neglected to address the basic premise on which the criticism held.

The cultural deviance critique contains three major components (Akers 1996; Akers 2009; Kornhauser 1978). First, the critique holds that cultural deviance theories assume human nature to be a *tabula rasa*. Second, cultural deviance theories assume that

the socialization process perfectly instills within group members the culture of the social group. Third, and following from the previous two assumptions, cultural deviance theories imply individuals cannot be deviant because any deviance on the part of an individual is a direct reflection of the deviant status of the social group to which he or she belongs. Therefore, even perceived acts of deviance are actually acts of conformity within a particular group or subculture (Kornhauser 1978).

In responding to the cultural deviance critique as it relates to social learning theory, Akers focused on whether or not individuals were perfectly socialized into the values of their social groups. Akers (1996, 2009) noted that group membership is never perfect and individuals are exposed to a wide array of definitions from various groups. Since an individual might be exposed to a plurality of cultural values, no individual perfectly reflects the values of a social a particular group and therefore the cultural deviance critique that socialization is a perfect process is inaccurate. Moreover, Akers also accused Kornhauser of selectively quoting from the works of Sutherland and representing only extreme cases. In doing so, even if an individual were to be perfectly socialized into a deviant group, this would represent a very small number of cases in which group membership is orthogonal (ibid.).

While Akers did address the issue of whether individuals are perfectly socialized into the values of a singular group, his response failed to address the issue of whether social learning theory assumed human nature to be a *tabula rasa*. Moreover, it could be argued that Akers further cemented this assumption of human nature within the theory because part of his response acknowledged that motivations were, in fact, learned. Thus, while it is *inaccurate* to claim social learning theory assumes the values of a group in a differentiated society are perfectly instilled within its members, it remains *accurate* to identify the theory with a *tabula rasa* assumption of human nature.

This distinction is important because much of the debate surrounding theory integration in criminology has hinged on the issue of whether criminological theories with contradictory assumptions of human nature could be integrated. Even if social learning theory is not a cultural deviance theory, its *tabula rasa* assumption of human nature remains incompatible with assumptions of human nature resting on hedonism (see Hirschi 1979, 1989). One cannot be perfectly plastic while at the same time being predisposed to pursue pleasure over pain. As illustrated in Chapter 2, this problem is not present within differential association theory since individuals naturally possess hedonistic natural attitudes that provide the foundation for all behavioral motives. Within social learning theory, however, no equivalent concept exists.

While social learning theory makes no concrete statement surrounding the presence of innate drives, one should refrain from interpreting it as having a *tabula rasa* assumption of human nature for several reasons. First, since behaviorism argues that animals learn as a consequence of punishment and rewards, and that the avoidance of aversive stimuli is in itself a reward, it is clear that behaviorism does not significantly differ from *homo economicus* assumptions of human nature relating to hedonism. Second, social learning theory acknowledges the existence of non-social sources of reinforcement, which can originate *within* an individual. Hunger, for example, can serve as an aversive stimulus (Akers 2009) which motivates an individual to seek relief through eating. These two points illustrate that social learning theory does not, in fact, assume human nature to be a *tabula rasa*. A blank slate contains no predisposition to prioritize pain over pleasure, nor would it allow for fluctuations in biological states to “drive” an individual to seek a reprieve from aversive stimuli.

As a result of social learning theory’s behaviorist foundation, three assumptions of human nature can be identified within the theory. First, humans are predisposed to favor pleasure over pain. Under behaviorism, learning is simply not possible without such



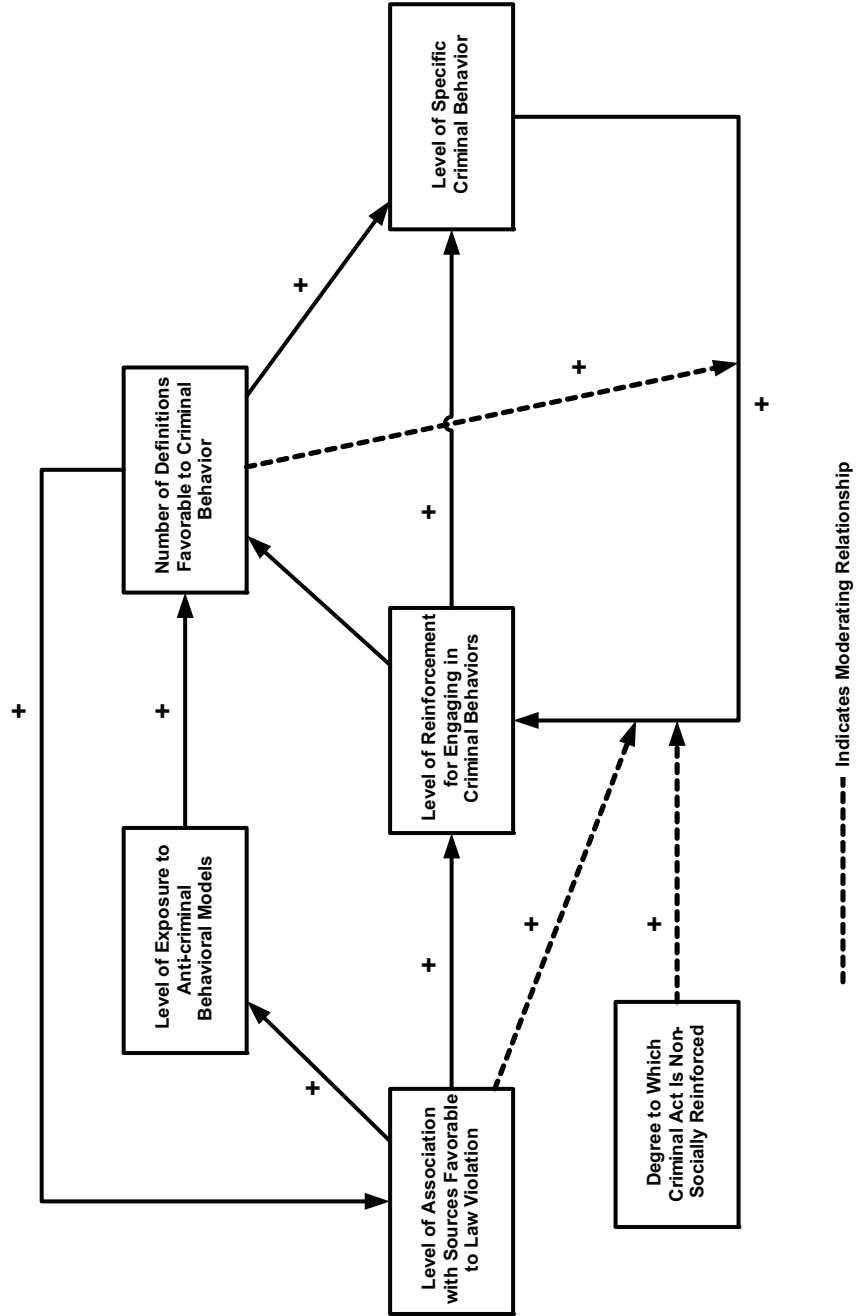
a predisposition. Second, an organism's biological state can provide it with positive or aversive stimuli. Just as eating relieves hunger, pulling one's hand away from a fire relieves the immediate pain. All of these stimuli could be directly related to notions of hedonism, and therefore social learning theory's acknowledgement that non-social stimuli affect behavior furthers distances the theory from assuming human nature to be a *tabula rasa*. Third, any theory which proposes a behavior can be learned assumes the organism learning possesses a degree of behavioral plasticity – that is, the organism is not prepackaged with *immutable* behaviors towards environmental objects. The assumptions of human nature contained within social learning theory, then, are three fold.

These three assumptions of human nature are not significantly different from differential association theory, nor will they be significantly different from social control theory (see Chapter 4) or general strain theory (Chapter 5). Additionally, in light of the assumptions of human nature presented in regard to differential association theory in Chapter 2, and those discussed here in reference to social learning theory, it is apparent that the cultural deviance construct was nothing more than a misrepresentation of social learning theories that has been used to further advance control perspectives on deviance.

### **Theoretical Formalization**

Social learning theory specifies that four major factors are associated with the genesis of criminal or deviant behaviors: differential associations; differential reinforcements (both social and non-social); behavioral modeling (vicarious learning); and definitions favorable to deviant/criminal behavior (deviant/criminal cognitions). Social learning theory predicts that criminal behavior is a positive function of the degree to which: (1) an individual associates with individuals or other sources of information which contain social meanings that directly promote criminal behavior; (2) a person is exposed to behavioral models (both real or fictitious) which indirectly promote criminal behavior, (3) a person

**Figure 3.1**  
**Parsimonious Social Learning Theory Model**



experiences reinforcements for criminal behavior; and (3) a person possesses definitions (cognitions) which are favorable to criminal behavior. The concepts and relationships between these concepts will be further explicated. Figure 3.1 provides a summarization of the basic causal relationships within social learning theory; at the end of the section a more detailed model will be proposed.

### **Differential Association**

A person's associations with others and various media expose the individual to behavioral reinforcements or punishments and the normative dimensions surrounding a particular behavior (Akers 2009). Primary groups, such as the family or peer groups, serve as the primary associations related to the learning of criminal behavior. Primary groups control reinforcements and punishments pertaining to specific behaviors, and they additionally provide an individual with behavioral models. As a result of social control efforts on the part of one's primary group, patterns of behaviors and definitions of the situation are learned which are either favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior. Secondary groups, such as the media, also provide individuals with behavioral and definitional reinforcements, although the influence of secondary groups is seen as being less influential than that of primary groups.

An individual's interaction's with primary and secondary groups vary by frequency, duration, intensity, and priority (Akers 2009; see also Sutherland 1947). Frequency and duration simply referred to the amount of time spent interacting with others who reinforce criminal behaviors. Intensity refers to the significance, salience, and importance of the association, while priority refers to the age at which an interaction occurs. Social learning theory, like differential association theory, holds that interactions which occur early in life are more influential than those which occur in adulthood.

Primary groups are high in these modalities of interaction and therefore weigh heavily on the degree to which an individual will learn criminal behaviors and definitions. An individual's first relationships with others occur in primary groups and thus these interactions are likely to be high in regards to intensity and priority. Interactions with primary groups also occur more frequently and regularly than interactions with other types of groups. Additionally, interactions with primary groups are more likely to be present throughout one's life.

As a result of the importance of interactions with primary groups, characteristics of primary groups can serve as a global indicator for criminal behavior (Akers 2009). To the degree to which a primary group is in line with conventional values, an individual will likely experience interactions which punish criminal behavior, provide definitions in the form of morals against criminal behavior, and provide behavioral models which promote behavior that is in line with conventional values (ibid.).

### **Differential Reinforcement**

Within social learning theory, criminal behavior is learned through operant conditioning in which criminal behavior is either rewarded or punished (Akers 1985, 2009). Unlike respondent behavior, which is mediated by the autonomic nervous system and is the focus of classical conditioning, operant behavior is learned as a result of being exposed to environmental stimuli. In operant conditioning, an individual learns a behavior in response to stimuli depending upon the degree to which that behavior is rewarded or punished. Rewards can either be positive or negative. Positive rewards entail behaviors which are followed by a positive outcome, such as pleasure, while negative rewards entail the withdrawal of an aversive stimulus following a behavior. While rewards increase the probability that a behavior will be exhibited in the future, punishments lead to the inhibition, reduction, or termination of a behavior. Like rewards, there are both positive and

negative forms of punishment. In the case of positive punishment, a person experiences an aversive stimulus following a behavior. In the case of negative punishment, an individual loses a reward following a behavior. In social learning theory, an individual's reinforcement history pertaining to criminal activities reflects the degree to which that individual has learned criminal behavior.

Differential reinforcement serves as the primary mechanism by which behaviors are learned within the theory. Differential reinforcement occurs in several ways within the theory. First, one's primary group serves as the origin for many patterns of reinforcement. These patterns consist of both rewards and punishments. A father or mother may scold a child for taking something from the grocery store without paying for it, or a close friend may reward the same behavior with approval. In both cases rewards and punishments are a direct function of one's associations. Secondly, criminal behavior results in the formation of definitions of the situation which are either favorable or unfavorable to future criminal behaviors. This point will be elaborated in the section that discusses definitions in more detail; however, for now it is important to note that a component of the learning process is not simply the behavior itself but also cognitions surrounding that behavior. Third, criminal behaviors in themselves may be rewarding in either social or non-social ways. Some crimes, like illegal drug use, may be intrinsically rewarding independent of any social approval that may be associated with the behavior (Akers 2009). Additionally, individuals who are physiologically predisposed to be thrill seeking also may engage in criminal acts on the basis of intrinsic rewards. While non-social rewards do occur, most criminal behavior is either rewarded or punished in social interactions, and social rewards include such things as status or prestige.

While the previous discussions have emphasized environmental, or external, constellations of rewards and punishments, it is also possible for an individual to engage in self-punishment and regulate his or her own behavior. As a result of conditioning histo-

ries, individuals internalize values present within their environment and through role-taking behavior can engage in self-punishment following a given behavior (ibid.). Another component of the self-regulation of behavior entails the anticipation of punishment or rewards by others. This process of anticipation occurs within the individual and serves to regulate behavior regardless of whatever forms of social control are ultimately exercised by others (ibid.). This process of self-regulation, through self-punishment or the anticipation of punishment, leads an individual to form self-control. Self-control may be specific to a situation, or it may extend across a wide array of situations. The incorporation of the concepts of self-control, anticipated sanctions, and self-punishment into social learning theory suggests cognition plays an important part in the learning process. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on definitions.

An additional element of self-control relates to one's choice of associations. Since individuals are capable of anticipating rewards and punishments from others, a consequence of this awareness is that individuals seek to interact with others who are likely to reward his or her behavior (ibid.). Thus, a "flocking" phenomenon occurs whereby individuals are not simply passively subject to the socialization efforts of their primary groups, but rather individuals actively seek interaction with others that will likely reward criminal behavior.

### **Behavioral Modeling/Imitation**

Sutherland (1947) originally mentioned imitation as one way in which behaviors could be learned and social learning theory further develops this idea by borrowing from Bandura (1977) the notion of vicarious learning. The modeling of behavior, though seen as being less influential than differential reinforcement, nonetheless provides an alternate way in which behavior may be learned. A person experiences vicarious reinforcement depending upon the degree to which the individual holds a behavioral model in high es-

teem and the degree to which the model demonstrates pleasure in response to a particular stimulus (Akers 2009). When an individual finds him or herself in a similar situation, the individual is more likely to engage in the behavior which was demonstrated by the behavioral model.

Vicarious learning need not relate to real individuals or situations experienced firsthand (ibid.). While differential association theory acknowledged the potential for media to influence behavior, vicarious learning allows for individuals exposed to media to vicariously experience behaviors to which they are not witness. At the time of Sutherland's writing, media were far less developed and therefore may have been less influential (ibid.). Regardless of its source, within social learning theory, as was the case in differential association theory, imitation or vicarious learning is seen to be a mechanism of learning less effective than actual interactions with others in learning criminal behavior.

The notion of vicarious learning assumes that cognitions pertaining to the observed rewards experienced by others are being stored within the memory of an individual in a manner that can be used should the individual encounter a similar situation. Social learning theory does not fully articulate the nature of these cognitions, although the psychological social learning theory (Bandura 1977) from which it is drawn does specify this vicarious learning process in more detail. This process first entails the observation of a model engaging in some form of behavior in which an individual observes the salient characteristics of the model, the behavior the model is engaging in, and the reward or punishment attached to the behaviors. During this part of the process, an individual symbolically encodes his or her observations into memory, which allows for the individual to call the observation to mind regardless of whether the environmental stimulus relating to the observation is present. Through the use of language and verbal codes these observations can be rehearsed, with such a rehearsal strengthening the encoded model in memory. Efforts to engage in a modeled behavior require the individual to partly rely upon memory

and partly rely upon imagination in order to engage in that behavior. Once the memories of the model are supplemented by imaginal representations, the behavior is reproduced through an effort to replicate, in terms of motor functioning, the original behavior of the model. To the degree to which an individual possesses necessary skills, accurately translates ideas to behaviors, and refines the behavior through trial and error, an individual is able to eventually reproduce a model's behavior. Simply observing, encoding, rehearsing, and possessing the ability to reproduce an observed form of behavior is insufficient for an individual to actually reproduce the behavior. In order for the modeled behavior to occur, an individual must also *want* the reward associated with the behavior.

This incorporation of vicarious learning into social learning theory further places the theory to be much more in line with the symbolic interactionism that served as the foundation of differential association theory (Akers 2009). In doing so, the radical behaviorism originally contained within the original statement of social learning theory (Burgess and Akers 1966) has been greatly de-emphasized and the theory has become a soft form of behaviorism (Akers 2009).

The cognitions generated through observational learning, and operant learning as well, lead to the formation of definitions of the situation either favorable or unfavorable to law violation within social learning theory. In the next section, the concept of definitions is further explicated.

### **Definitions**

Unlike differential association theory, which saw definitions as a necessary condition for criminal behavior, social learning theory (ibid.) postulates that definitions may proceed or succeed a criminal act. Within social learning theory, the term definitions pertains to a wide array of cognitive factors associated with action, these include: skills



pertaining to a specific act; definitions of the situation; neutralizations; and self-concepts.

Much like differential association theory, within social learning theory skills provide individuals with the opportunity to engage in criminal behavior. Skills can be considered a form of definition because, within a situation, they orient the actions of an individual. Skills need not be specific to a particular crime, although for particular crimes specific skills may be required, and skills vary in terms of complexity. For example, writing a bad check requires minimal skill. Forging checks, on the other hand, requires far more skill. Additionally, skills can be learned through both noncriminal and criminal activities. In Cressey's (1950, 1952) study of embezzlement, skills learned in the course of an individual's occupation, accompanied by skills learned to detect financial crimes, afforded individuals the necessary skills required to engage in trust violations should an individual wish to do so.

Skills can be subsumed under a broader concept of definitions. While the concept of the definition of the situation was carried over from differential association theory, its origins lie within the social psychology of Thomas ([1923] 1967). Definitions contain attitudes and motives, which orient an individual's behavior toward particular social objects. Thus, a definition not only specifies how one should *act* towards a social object, but also specifies to which *objects* one should orient his or her behavior. Within social learning theory, definitions are learned primarily through operant conditioning and therefore to the degree to which an individual has been differentially reinforced to engage in criminal activities, an individual will contain cognitions – specifically, definitions of the situation – which predispose the individual to engage in similar future criminal behaviors. Unlike differential association theory in which only the *direction* of motives could be learned, within social learning theory motives themselves can be learned (Akers 1985, 1996, 2009).

In addition to skills, motives, and attitudes, another kind of definition is a neutralization. Like all definitions, neutralizations may precede or succeed a criminal act (Akers 2009, Sykes and Matza 1957). Within social learning theory, neutralizations serve as a discriminant stimulus within a situation that negates definitions unfavorable to the commission of a criminal act and frees an individual from either internal or external values that regulate the particular behavior. Thus, neutralizations grant an individual a moral reprieve within a situation and allow for one to engage in criminal behavior. Neutralizations provide individuals with exceptions to general held social values (e.g., denying one is responsible for criminal behavior or framing the act in terms of it being justified because of higher obligations) and can be seen as an extension of legally recognized defenses for criminal behaviors that are not recognized by the legal system or society at large (Sykes and Matza 1957).

Another form of definition which is less emphasized in social learning theory is one's definition of self. As a result of socialization through learning processes related to operant conditioning and behavioral modeling, an individual learns to self-regulate behavior and take the role of the other (Akers 2009). Self-regulation occurs when an individual punishes himself or herself following a behavior. Self-regulation also occurs when an individual engages in role-taking behavior and anticipates potential rewards or punishments that others may apply should the individual engage in a particular behavior. Due to these dual mechanisms of self-regulation, one develops a sense of self-control.

This notion of self-control is not well articulated within social learning theory. The theory does not explicitly state that, in fact, one has definitions of self, and instead discusses self-control in regard to differential reinforcement. However, since reinforcement histories lead to the formation of definitions, it must be through these definitions that one self-regulates behavior. Self punishment requires an awareness of the moral sta-

tus of the act, which is cognitive in nature, and role-taking behavior requires an individual to be aware of the morals possessed by others in order to anticipate whether an act will be followed by reward or punishment.

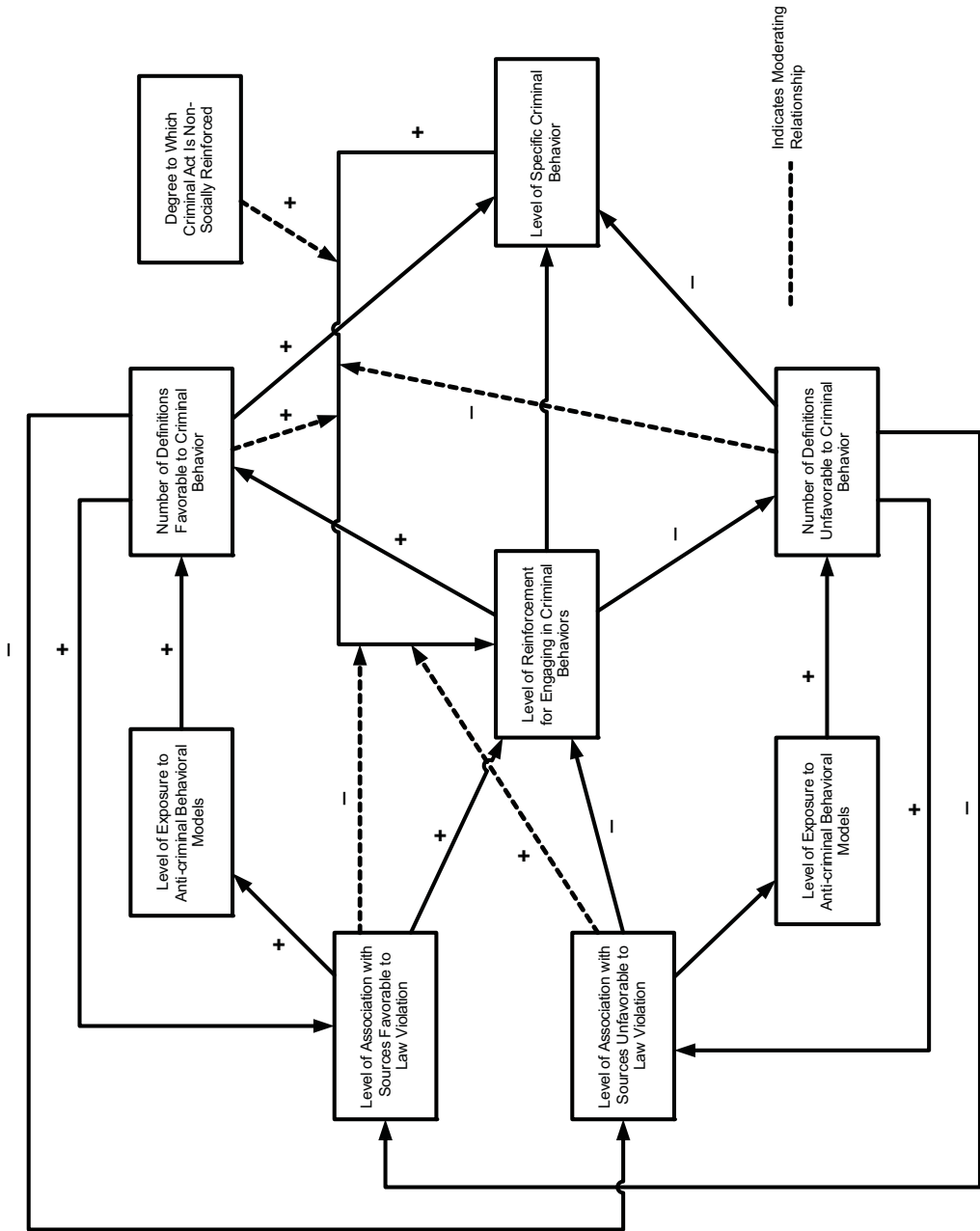
While the previous discussion has focused on the content of definitions, it is also important to emphasize their structure in terms of generality and specificity (ibid.). All definitions vary in the degree to which they apply to particular situations or across situations. Within a given situation, there are a variety of individuals or symbols that indicate to an individual whether an act is likely to be reinforced. These discriminant stimuli vary in the degree to which they are present across situations and times. An internalized definition, such as it is wrong to kill people, would be a general definition insofar as it applied to a variety of contexts. However, even should such a general definition be present, a neutralization could serve as a discriminant stimuli which neutralizes the relevance of a particular definition within a given situation or set of situations. It may be perceived by an individual to be immoral to kill another, but it would be permissible to do so if within a situation such an act related to self-defense.

### **Criminal/Deviant Behavior**

Social learning theory serves as an etiological explanation of criminal or deviant behavior. Within the theory, criminal behavior is seen simply as a subset of a more general class of deviant behavior that is codified in the form of laws, and deviant behavior is simply a behavior which violates the social norms of a group (Akers 1985, 2009). Thus, social learning theory attempts to explain deviant behavior, which serves as an umbrella term for a wide array of behaviors, including: criminal behavior; delinquent behavior; and other behaviors which violate social norms.

Figure 3.2 outlines the detailed causal relationships proposed within social learning theory. An individual's exposure to reinforcements or punishments favorable or

**Figure 3.2**  
**Detailed Social Learning Theory Model**



unfavorable to criminal behavior is largely the result of the individual's associations with others that control behavior reinforcements. These reinforcements can directly affect criminal behavior within a situation, and they additionally lead to the creation of definitions (cognitions) within the individuals that are either favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior. One's associations can also create within an individual definitions favorable to criminal behaviors by providing the individual with models of criminal behavior. Definitions favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior are the result of exposure to behavior models, reinforcements, and punishments pertaining to a specific behavior. Should an individual experience the opportunity to commit a crime, these definitions – in the form of attitudes, motives, concepts of self, and concepts of others – result in criminal behavior insofar as the definition of the situation holds that criminal behavior will be rewarded.

Subsequent to an individual's criminal behavior, the rewards or punishments he or she experiences are moderated by: the individual's associations with others; the degree to which the behavior is non-socially reinforced; the degree to which the individual engages in self-punishment; and the degree to which the individual possesses neutralizations that justify the criminal act. If one's associates administer punishment for the behavior, then definitions of the situation unfavorable to future occurrences of the behavior will be generated. Should an individual be rewarded for criminal behavior by others, the individual will internalize a definition of the situation favorable to the act which will increase the probability of future demonstrations of the behavior. Likewise, should an individual experience non-social rewards as a result of the behaviors (e.g., a drug induced euphoria), the criminal behavior will be reinforced and definitions favorable to future enactments of the behaviors will be created. On the other hand, should an individual become violently ill following drug use, the illegal behavior is less likely to reoccur and the individual will possess definitions unfavorable to the behavior. Lastly, if an individual recognizes the

immoral status of an act, the individual is likely to engage in self-punishment, which decreases the likelihood of future occurrences of the behaviors. If an individual possesses neutralizations that justify the criminal behavior, however, the individual can be freed from self-punishment and is more likely to repeat the criminal or deviant behavior in the future.

### **Scope Conditions**

Social learning theory contains several scope conditions that relate to the theory's level of explanation. As a microlevel theory of criminal behavior, social learning theory does not explain the distribution of reinforcements or behavioral models within the environment. While Akers (2009) has specified a complementary macrolevel theory, it is beyond the scope of social learning theory to explain reinforcement and modeling patterns within the environment.

An additional scope condition pertaining to social learning theories level of analysis is that it does not explain why an individual possesses certain biological predispositions to engage in particular behavioral patterns, nor does it explain how various biological mechanisms might affect the learning process. The theory does state that non-social rewards or punishments can be present. This might relate to thrill-seeking behavior or biological reactions to drug behavior (Akers 2009), or even basic biological functioning such as hunger. The genetic, hormonal, biomechanical, or other biochemical processes occurring within the individual which affects how non-social reinforcements or punishments might be experienced are beyond the scope of the theory.

Another limitation of social learning theory is that it postulates learning only occurs as a result of operant conditioning or vicarious learning processes. This empirical stance does not allow for cognitive innovations that might precede an individual's expo-

sure to rewards, punishments, or behavioral models. Within cognitive psychology, induction through the use of analogy or metaphor is seen as allowing individuals to act in novel situations (see Holyoak and Nisbett 1988). Such situations would be free of a particular reinforcement history and behaviors that are the result of mental operations relating to the use of analogy or metaphor are therefore outside of the scope of social learning theory.

### **Conclusion**

As an elaboration of differential association theory, social learning theory specifies how behaviors and definitions favorable to criminal activities are formed through processes of operant conditioning and vicarious learning. Learning is possible as a result of the biological tendency of human beings (and other animals as well) to favor rewards over punishments. Additionally, human behavior is assumed to be plastic, otherwise learning could not occur. The theory further specifies that differential associations affect the genesis of criminal behavior because they control behavioral reinforcements and present individuals with behavioral models. These reinforcements and behavioral models lead an individual to learn definitions favorable or unfavorable to criminal behavior, and additionally provide individuals with self-concepts, which allow for the self-regulation of behavior. While an individual may engage in self-punishment, it is also possible that an individual might possess neutralizations that mitigate this punishment.

Social learning theory only explains a behavior at the level of the individual and does not attempt to explain macrolevel sources of variation pertaining to reinforcements or models, nor does the theory attempt to explain how the biological functioning of an organism affects the degree to which non-social reinforcements or punishments are experienced. In order to further summarize and re-articulate social learning theory, a formal statement of the theory is presented.

## Theoretical Restatement

### *Assumptions*

- A1. Human nature contains a predisposition to favor rewards over punishments.
- A2. Human behavior is plastic.
- A3. An individual's biological state can provide him or her with non-social stimuli which serve as either behavior rewards or punishment.

### *Conceptual Definitions*

- D1. *Differential Association* – The degree to which an individual interacts with other individuals or sources of social information (e.g., media, works of fiction) which provide reinforcements, punishments, behavioral models, and definitions (all of which may be structured or patterned) which encourage criminal or deviant behaviors.
- D2. *Differential Reinforcement* – The degree to which an individual receives rewards or punishments following criminal or deviant behaviors.
  - A. *Positive reinforcement* – The degree to which an individual experiences pleasure or positive stimuli following an individual's engagement in a particular behavior.
  - B. *Negative reinforcement* – The degree to which an individual experiences an adverse stimuli which is avoided or mitigated following an individual's engagement in a particular behavior.
  - C. *Positive punishment* – The degree to which an individual experiences aversive stimuli following a behavior.
  - D. *Negative reinforcement* – The degree to which a positively valued reward is removed following one's engagement in a particular behavior.
- D3. *Behavioral Modeling* – The process whereby one learns vicariously by the observation of others (whether real or fictional/directly or indirectly) experiencing



rewards or punishments following a behavior and the formation of definitions surrounding this behavior.

- D4. *Definitions* - Cognitions stored in memory in the form of skills, motives (including anticipated rewards), attitudes, neutralizations, and self-concepts which orient an individual's behavior within a given situation or across a wide array of situations.
- A. *Neutralization* – A specific kind of definition which justifies a criminal act on the basis that it is an exception to a generally held social value.
  - B. *Self-control* – the process whereby an individual inhibits criminal or deviant behaviors on the basis of punishments an individual imposes on him or herself, or refrains from criminal behavior as a result of anticipating punishment from other.
- D5. *Criminal behavior* – A deviant behavior which violates a criminal law.
- D6. *Deviant behavior* – A behavior which violates the norms of a social group.

#### *Knowledge Claims*

- P1. Criminal or deviant behavior is a positive function of frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of one's:
- A. Associations that are favorable to criminal violations.
  - B. Behavioral models which experience rewards for engaging in criminal behaviors.
  - C. Definitions which see criminal behavior as being rewarding.
- P2. Criminal or deviant behavior is a positive function of the level of reinforcement one experiences following a criminal behavior.
- P3. The degree to which a criminal or deviant behavior is reinforced is a:
- A. Positive function of the degree to which the behavior is non-socially rewarding.
  - B. Negative function of the degree to which self-control produces punishments for the behavior.

- C. Positive function of the degree to which an individual possesses neutralizations for the specific behavior or class of behaviors.
  - D. A positive function of the degree to which associations provide reinforcements for the behavior (e.g., approval, status).
- P4. The degree to which an individual possess definitions favorable to engaging in criminal or deviant acts is a positive function of:
- A. The degree to which a criminal/deviant behavior has been reinforced in the past (either socially or non-socially).
  - B. The degree to which one has been exposed to behavioral models which are reinforced for criminal or deviant behavior.
- P5. The degree to which an individual differentially associates with sources favorable to criminal or deviant behavior is a positive function of the degree to which an individual anticipates reinforcements for criminal behavior from an association.

*Scope Conditions*

- SC1. The distribution of association within an individual's environment is beyond the scope of the theory.
- SC2. The biological or physiological sources of variation affecting the way in which a person experiences a particular stimulus is beyond the scope of the theory.
- SC2. Other possible source of learning (such as those relating to induction, analogies, or metaphors) are beyond the scope if the theory.

## Chapter 4

### Social Control Theory

The emergence of social control theory represented a response to learning and strain theories of criminal behavior which were predominant prior to the 1960s (Hirschi 1989). Operating upon the assumption that human nature was essentially hedonistic, social control theory posits that the absence of social control is sufficient in explaining why individuals *did not* engage in criminal behaviors and no special explanation of criminal motivation was necessary to explain the occurrence of a crime (Hirschi [1969] 2005). Within social control theory, controls are not merely internal or external constraints on behavior but rather they are emergent properties of an individual's bonds to society. That is, social control is a property of one's embeddedness in conventional relationships and the degree to which one lacks conventional ties he or she is free to deviate from the norms of conventional society.

The processes of formalizing social control theory will specify the theory's causal relationships in more detail and in doing so will focus particular attention on the theory's assumptions of human nature, core theoretical concepts, and propositional relationships. Additionally, attention will be given to the theory's scope conditions. Prior to engaging in this formalization, however, it is important to distinguish social control theory from self-control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi [1990] 2004). Whereas self-control theory emphasizes that individuals with the durable trait of low self-control are more likely to engage in criminal behavior, social control theory emphasizes an absence of bonds to society as being the primary source of criminal behavior. While both theories share similar assumptions of human nature, they remain distinct theories (Hirschi [1969] 2005: xiv). As such, this formalization only will focus upon social control theory.

### **Assumptions of Human Nature**

Perhaps one of the most emphasized aspects of social control theory is its assumption of human nature. This is primarily for two reasons. First, at the time of its inception social control theory was unique in that the motivation of criminal offenders was viewed as something that did not require a special explanation (Hirschi [1969] 2004). Rather than trying to explain criminal motivations as being learned or the result of social pressures, social control theory has emphasized the Hobbesian question of why individuals conform to societal rules. Thus, the primary research problem social control theory sought to explain surrounds why individuals fail to conform to societal rules rather than why individuals deviate from them.

A second reason the role of human nature is so unambiguous within social control theory is that it was central to the integration-elaboration debate which held the attention of criminologists throughout the late 1970s and the entire 1980s (see Messner, Krohn, and Liska 1989). As a result of efforts by Elliot, Ageton, and Cantor (1979) to integrate empirically strain, differential association, and social control theories, a firestorm of debate ensued surrounding whether it was possible to integrate criminological theories with *seemingly* contradictory assumptions of human nature. Whereas cultural deviance theories assumed human nature to be *tabula rasa* and strain theories assumed human nature to be essentially pro-social or to tend towards conformity, control theories assumed human nature to be hedonistic. As a result of these contradictory assumptions of human nature the three theories were seen as incompatible in regards to theoretical integration (Hirschi 1989). This discussion of the underlying assumptions of human nature contained within criminological theories will be revisited in the final chapter. For now, it is sufficient to simply observe these disparate takes on the human condition and further elaborate upon the consequences social control theory's assumption of human nature has upon the relationship between the theory's *explanan* and *explanandum*.

Social control theory includes two basic assumptions of human nature: hedonism and plasticity. While its assumption of hedonism is in line with hedonistic assumptions of human nature contained within differential association and social learning theories, social control theory's view of plasticity is more limited.

### **Hedonism**

Social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) views human nature to be hedonistic and assumes hedonistic tendencies to be constant across all individuals. This view of human nature is a response to the question of why individuals engage in criminal behavior. Social control theory's response to this question is that all individuals are capable of engaging in criminal behavior because hedonism, and therefore motivation, is a human constant. Despite seeing individuals as being inherently hedonistic, social control theory does *not* assume motivation necessarily leads to criminal *or* non-criminal outcomes (Hirschi, [1969] 2005: 33). Instead, social control theory does not problematize motivation, and rather than asking why an individual engages in criminal behavior, the theory asks why don't individuals engage in crime?<sup>1</sup>

### **Plasticity**

Since social control theory is only interested in explaining why individuals *do not* engage in criminal behavior, it is only interested in socialization processes insofar as they prevent criminal behavior. Social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) does view human nature as being plastic in regards to this question, as the theory sees individuals as being capable of being socialized to hold beliefs in the legitimacy of the social order and the immorality of certain behaviors. While plasticity is present in regards to learning not to engage in criminal behavior, it is more limited than social learning theory in its view of plasticity since social control theory eschews the possibility of learning motives.

In sum, social control theory assumes human nature to be hedonistic and plastic. While human nature can be molded through socialization, socialization processes result not in the learning of behavioral motivations but rather in the self-regulation of pre-existing innate and hedonistic tendencies through one's belief in the conventional moral order. The theory does not assume hedonistic tendencies lead to criminal or non-criminal behaviors. Instead, it utilizes its assumption of hedonism to hold constant motivation across all actors.

### **Theoretical Restatement**

Social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) proposes that individuals *do not* engage in criminal behaviors as a result of their bonds to conventional society. Thus, unlike other theories being formalized, social control theory is not explaining the occurrence of crimes, but rather the absence of crimes. In explaining the absence of crimes, social control theory posits that one's level of social control is positively related to the absence of criminal behavior.

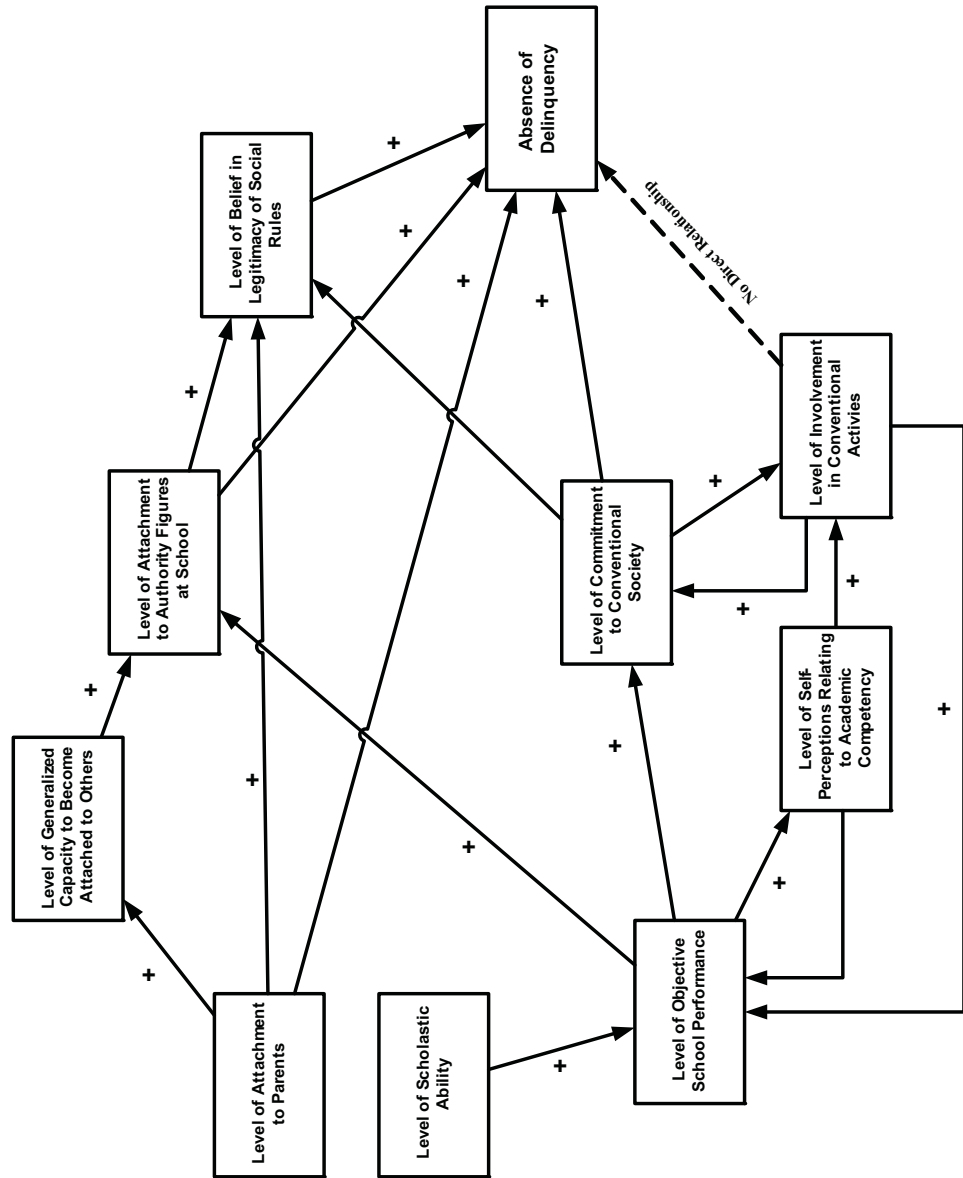
### **Level of Social Control**

The amount of social control to which an individual is exposed is a result of the individual's level of: (1) attachment to convention members of society; (2) commitment to the conventional society; (3) involvement in conventional activities; and (4) belief in the norms and values of the society. The social bonds one has with society serve to regulate behavior from engaging in criminal behavior.

### *Attachments*

Rather than emphasizing the role a superego or other mental concepts reflecting the internalization of social values might play in regulating criminal behavior, social

**Figure 4.1**  
**Social Control Theoretical Model**



control theory emphasizes the degree to which an individual is attached affectually to conventional members of society as both directly and indirectly affecting the absence of criminal or delinquent behavior (Hirschi [1969] 2004). Under this view, should behavior patterns take a turn in a criminal direction, this is not the result of an individual lapsing into temporary psychosis or a change in one's conscience. Instead, it is the result of changing affectual ties and such ties are seen as being both directly and indirectly regulating human behavior. Attachments to parents, peers, and teachers are particularly emphasized within the theory.

*Attachment to Parents.* A parent exercises direct controls when he or she engages in direct supervision of the activity a child and thus impedes upon the child's freedom to engage in criminal behavior (ibid.). But such direct supervision is only a small part of social control, and social control theory holds that indirect controls are far more important. When confronted with the opportunity to engage in delinquent activity in the absence of direct controls, children will contemplate what a parent *would* think of a particular behavior and as a result will refrain from such activities insofar as the child believes a parent would disapprove. This *virtual control* is the result of children sharing a mental life with his or her parents and is accompanied by the perception that parents are always aware of their children's location and activities. The degree to which a child shares a mental life with his or her parents is reflected by the degree to which the child relates to his or her parents by: (1) seeking their opinions; (2) sharing his or her thoughts and feelings; (3) discussing future plans; or (4) having parents clarify rules or understand things the child otherwise doesn't understand. The importance of a shared mental life lies not with the frequency of interactions, but rather lies within the content conveyed during such mental-life sharing activities. The content of such exchanges, however, are not the source of attachment, but rather moral attachment lies within the bond itself. Additionally, it would be tempting to infer that a bond could facilitate both legally conforming and deviant



behavior depending on the nature of the shared mental life and whether or not a parent or parents were criminals. Social control theory rejects such a possibility by noting that such a relationship would require a parent to share information pertaining to his or her criminal activities with his or her children. Social control theory denies such a phenomenon occurs (ibid.).

In addition to the direct and indirect functions of attachment in regulating behavior, it also generates a generalized capacity within children to become attached to others as well (ibid.). Attachments to parents instill children with the ability to attach to other individuals, particularly authority figures, and additionally fosters a general *belief* in the legitimacy of social rules. As such, attachment to parents affects one's level of freedom to engage in criminal behavior in terms of direct and indirect controls, the genesis of the generalized capacity to attach to others, and the belief in the conventional moral order it instills within a child.

*Attachment to school.* In addition to being attached to parents affectively, children also are attached to schools in a variety of ways (ibid.). Unlike families which may deviate from conventional society, schools, when part of a universal system of education, are tightly coupled with the conventional social order. As such, they not only facilitate bonds related to attachment, they also foster social bonds related to involvement, commitment, and belief. The process whereby one becomes attached to school entails: (1) the student's academic ability; (2) the objective level of academic performance which follows from academic ability; (3) the emergence of self-perceptions of academic ability; and (4) attachments to the school which are the result of academic achievement. To say one is attached to a school affectively, then, is to say that a child cares what teachers or school personal thinks of him or her (ibid.).

For social control theory, the affective relationships which develop between children and agents of the schools are first based upon the academic abilities of a child (ibid.).

Within the theory, academic ability is related to intelligence, and a child possessing high levels of academic ability will perform better in school. The increased school performance leads to attachments to teachers and other agents of the school. Additionally, it leads to involvement in conventional activities, which have the effect of further increasing a child's academic performance and commitments to conventional society. As a result of the additional attachments and stakes in conformity generated by successful academic performance, a child is less free to engage in delinquent activity.

*Attachment to Peers.* Unlike competing theories of crime, such as differential association theory, which would argue attachment to delinquent peers would be causally related to delinquency, social control theory holds that no such relationship exists (ibid.). While a general attachment to conventional others fosters social control and impedes the occurrence of delinquent acts, attachment to delinquent peers is theorized to not be related to delinquency within social control theory for several reasons. First, this is primarily because non-delinquents are unlikely to have delinquent friends as a result of their higher stakes in conformity. Second, since social control theory states that the absence of social control explains both why individuals engage in delinquent acts and why he or she associates with delinquent peers, the existence of any relationship between having delinquent friends and engaging in delinquency is seen as being spurious since they both are caused by the absence of social bonds.

While the social bond of attachment is often related to other social bonds, attachment represents an affectual bond between two individuals for whom which a mental life is shared – that is, one anticipates what others would think of his or her actions and adjusts his or her behavior accordingly. Within social control theory, the fear of what parents, teachers, or conventional peers might think should an actor engage in a delinquency serves as either a direct or indirect control over an individual's behavior and leads

to the absence of criminal behavior. Social control theory does not contain any concept which pertains to latent mental constructs such as a superego or conscience and instead sees attachment as the sociological equivalent of these concepts (ibid.). Within social control theory, one may believe in the moral order, but it is only through the other bonds, attachment and commitment in particular, do these beliefs carry weight.

### *Commitment*

Within social control theory, commitment reflects the degree to which an individual has investments in the conventional social order and stands to lose something should he or she engage in deviant or criminal behavior (ibid.). Social control theory proposes that the time and energy spent achieving conventional goals (such as academic success or career aspirations) instills within individuals a vested interest in conformity. Thus, social control theory also takes into account the rationality of actors (ibid.). Unlike classical economic theory's view of actors as having perfect knowledge, however, social control theory allows for a person's ignorance of the criminal status of an act to explain why an individual engages in a criminal behavior.<sup>2</sup> Ignorance, in this situation, reflects a failure of social controls to socialize an individual to *not* engage in certain acts.

### *Involvement*

Involvement, as a form of social bond, is intricately related to commitment. Whereas commitment reflects an individual's stakes in conformity, involvement reflects action taken on the part of an actor which are intended to realize conventional goals (ibid.). Within social control theory, involvement does not represent the proposition that boredom leads to crime, but instead represents the notion that conventional goals lead to conventional activities. In an effort to realize conventional goals, individuals will engage in conventional activities. Once an individual has achieved conventional goals, his or

her commitment to the conventional order is increased. Thus, there is a positive feedback loop present within the theory in which commitment leads to involvement, and involvement feeds subsequently increases commitment. As a result of the interrelated nature of commitment and involvement, involvement can be more specifically defined as being the engagement in any conforming behavior which is oriented towards a conventional goal. Since involvement is only important insofar as it increases commitment to conventional society, the relationship between involvement and the absence of criminal behaviors is indirect.

### *Belief*

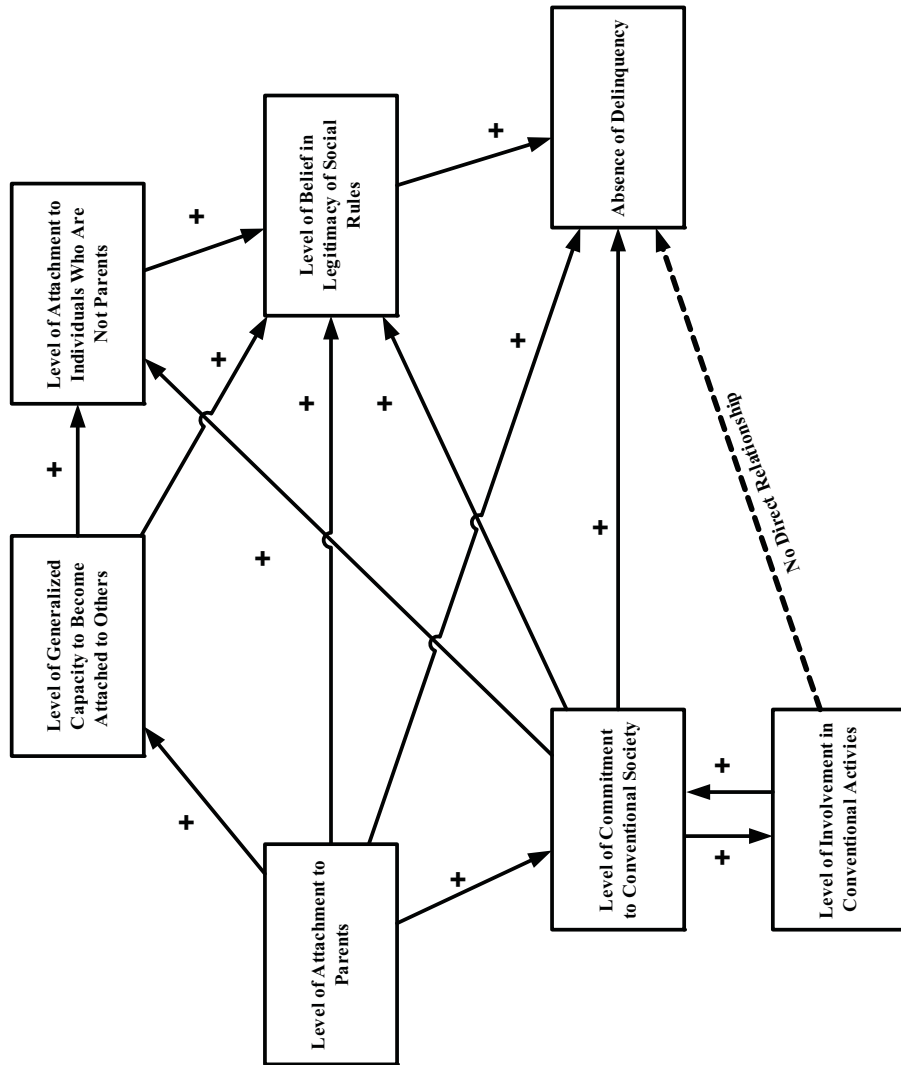
Unlike other theories of crime or delinquency which have emphasized heterogeneous social values within a society, social control theory assumes value-consensus exists within a society (ibid.). This assumption, however, does not mean individuals are invariant in terms in their belief in the legitimacy of social rules. Within social control theory, everyone is aware of the shared moral order, but as a result of variations within individual levels of commitment and attachment, the degree to which an individual believes he or she should adhere to conventional morality varies from person to person. Within social control theory, then, belief simply refers to the degree to which an individual perceives societal rules as being binding on one's behavior and the legitimacy one attributes to those enforcing these rules. It does not, however, pertain the belief in subcultural values because such beliefs under social control theory reflect the absence of attachments and commitments to conventional society, and therefore, the belief in subcultural values in fact represents an absence of bonds to conventional society. Since motivation is assumed within the theory, such an absence of social bonds is sufficient in explaining delinquent behavior and any relationship between subcultural values and delinquency is spurious.

### *Absence of Delinquency*

Although social control theory assumes value-consensus in regards to morality, the theory is oddly silent on the issue of legality. Social control theory seeks to explain the absence of delinquency, and defines delinquency as being "...acts, the detection of which is thought to result in punishment of the person committing them by agents of the larger society" (Hirschi [1969] 2004: 47). While it is clear delinquent acts are defined in terms of the punitive reactions they would generate should they be discovered, the theory does not specify the legal status of such acts as being important or that the age of an individual is in anyway relevant. As a result of the theory's omission of potential age or legal dimensions in regards to its definition of delinquency, various acts ranging from those punishable by disciplinary action taken by one's employer or teacher to those punishable by agents of the state would be defined as being delinquent acts. Delinquency, then, under social control theory is consistent with general notions of deviance (Hirschi [1969] 200).

It is also important to note that social control theory is not explaining the occurrence of delinquent behavior, but rather its absence. Social control theory is not concerned with why an individual engages in a specific criminal behavior because the motivation to engage in particular acts is seen as being constant. Instead, social control theory is concerned what factors prevent an individual from engaging in any type of criminal behavior. Since the absence of delinquent behavior can only be explained within social control theory as a function of the presence of social control, social control theory can explain the occurrence of a delinquent behavior as a function of the absence of control. Although this allows for social control theory to positively explain delinquent behavior as a function of the absence of social controls, it does not allow the theory to explain why an individual engages in a particular criminal behavior since motivation is seen within the theory as being constant.

**Figure 4.2**  
**Generalized Social Control Theoretical Model**



The original statement of social control theory can be further generalized from its original specification. In its original form, social control theory emphasized particular attachments and commitments related to the educational system and the degree to which they impacted the absence of delinquent behavior. As will be seen in the next section, this emphasis on social controls related to the educational system implies such a system must be universally in place in order for these forms of control to be exercised (ibid). However, it is possible to create a more generalized form of the model which is more concerned with attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs than is present within Figure 4.1. A generalized model is specified in Figure 4.2.

### **Scope Conditions**

Social control theory contains two major scope conditions that limits its ability to explain criminal behavior. First, the theory assumes the value-system of a society is culturally homogenous. Second, the theory is incapable of explaining particular criminal behavior and instead can only predict the outcome of criminal behavior in general.

### **Cultural Homogeneity**

As a result of social control theory's emphasis on value-consensus and social control, value-consensus within a society is necessary in order for social control theory to make accurate predictions surrounding delinquency. Value-consensus, however, is not a given, and structural relations can either enhance or diminish the presence of consensus within a society. Three particular forms of structural relations are particularly important in order for value-consensus to be present within social control theory.

First, disparate ethnic groups who differ significantly in social values and yet occupy a common political territory would violate social control theory's scope condition of value-consensus. Thus, social control theory would be of limited power in explaining delinquency under conditions of primary cultural conflict (see Sellin 1938), foreign occupancy of a state by a foreign power which imposes its own legal order, or under conditions in which autonomous ethnic nations exist within a political region which differ in moral beliefs. While it is possible social control theory could still yield accurate predictions under such conditions, social controls would need to be respecified in terms of connections to particular groups, and much theoretical work would be required in order to preserve the assumption of value-consensus.

Second, internal sources of social differentiation, which have traditionally been viewed to accompany modernity, also diminish value-consensus. As societies become more differentiated internally as a result of population increases and the accompanying differentiation which occurs within the economic division of labor, value-consensus diminishes and a plurality of groups emerge which potentially possess disparate values (Durkheim [1933] 1984). But shared institutions can mitigate the negative impact social differentiation has on shared values, and the educational system can serve a vital role in establishing common values (e.g., Durkheim 1956). In regards to the value-consensus scope condition, then, societies which have high levels of internal differentiation are only beyond the scope of social control theory's explanatory range insofar as the society also lacks integrating institutions, such as a universal educational system. Additionally, social control theory assumes the presence of rule enforcement agents is necessary in order for the bond of commitment to constrain individual behaviors effectively (Hirschi [1969] 2005). Any system of social control would also need to be universal in its application in order for such control efforts to maintain consistent enforcement of the values of conventional society. Insofar as internal differentiation undermines the consistency and univer-



sality of enforcement activities, a society in possession of such characteristics would also lie outside the scope of social control theory.

Although the assumption of value-consensus contained within social control theory limits the theory's applicability to societies with high levels of values-consensus, when treated as a scope condition, such a limitation also allows for the theory to make accurate predictions surrounding delinquency when the value-consensus scope condition is met. Under conditions of value-consensus, social control theory may have greater predictive power than theories, such as differential association, which assume high levels of social differentiation and the presence of conflicting values.

### **Specific Criminal Behaviors**

As a result of social control theory's *explanandum* being the absence of delinquent behavior, the theory is unable to explain why an individual engages in a specific criminal behavior. But because the theory can explain the absence of delinquent behavior, it can also explain the reciprocal of the absence of delinquent behavior – that is, the *occurrence* delinquent behavior. Since social control theory holds motivation constant, and therefore cannot explain why an individual engages in one act over another, explaining specific criminal behaviors are beyond the scope of the theory.

### **Conclusion**

Within social control theory, the absence of social controls is theorized to create delinquent outcomes, while the presence of social controls are intended to explain the absence of delinquent acts. Affective attachments generated within the family not only provide direct and indirect controls that regulate an individual's behaviors, but such attachments are also theorized to generate a general capacity to bond affectively with others, particularly authority figures. This capacity to bond allows for children to generate

attachments to teachers who additionally provide a source of social control. The social control exercised within the school is not simply a function of attachments to teachers, however, as the academic ability of an individual can lead an individual towards academic success. Academic success in turn fosters greater stakes in conformity and involvements in conventional activities that are aimed at achieving conventional goals. Attachments, commitments, and involvement in conventional activities all generate within the individual a belief in the legitimacy of the moral order and all these bonds together serve to regulate one's freedom to deviation.

But social control theory is not without its limitations. As a result of its emphasis on explaining the absence of delinquent behavior, it is only able to explain the occurrence of deviance behaviors and not their forms. An Additional theoretical limitation exists in terms of the theory's scope condition which specifies the theory works best in homogeneous societies. With these conceptual relationships and scope conditions in mind, a theoretical restatement will be proposed.

### **Theoretical Restatement**

#### *Assumptions*

- A1. Human nature is hedonistic.
- A2. Hedonism is the source of human motivations.
- A3. Hedonism is a human constant.
- A4. Human nature is plastic.

### *Conceptual Definitions*

- D1. *Social Control* – the regulation of hedonistic tendencies which is the result one's bonds (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief) to conventional society.
- A. *Attachment* – An affectual bond between individuals and conventional others in which the anticipated reactions of conventional others to the commission of a delinquent act serves to limit one's engagements in such acts.
  - B. *Commitment* – The amount of conventional social rewards or anticipated social rewards an individual stands to lose should he or she engage in delinquent activities.
  - C. *Involvement* – The amount of conventional activity one engages in which is intended to allow for the achievement of conventional goals.
  - D. *Belief* – The degree to which an individual within a society perceives the rules of the society to be binding upon one's behavior and the degree to which rule enforcement agents of the conventional order are seen as being legitimate.
  - E. *Delinquency* – An act which is punishable by representatives of conventional society should it be detected.

### *Knowledge Claims*

- P1. The absence of delinquency is a positive additive function of one's:
- A. Level of attachment.
  - B. Level of commitment.
  - C. Level of involvement.
  - D. Level of belief.
- P3. One's level of commitment is a positive function of one's:
- A. Level of attachment.
  - B. Level of involvement.
- P4. One's level of involvement is a positive function of one's level of commitment.

P5. One's level of belief is a positive function of one's:

- A. Level of attachment.
- B. Level of commitment.

*Scope Conditions*

SC1. Heterogeneous societies which lack value-consensus are beyond the scope of social control theory in explaining delinquent behavior.

SC2. The reasons why an individual engages in a specific criminal act is beyond the scope of the theory.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Hirschi [1969] 2005 advocates for explanations that explain the absence of a phenomenon. Thus, social control theory is only intended to explain the absence of criminal behavior and not its positive occurrence.

<sup>2</sup> This indicates that social control theory is not entirely incompatible with cultural conflict theory or differential association theory as both also allow for ignorance of conventional order to be a predictor of criminal activity.

## **Chapter 5**

### **General Strain Theory**

The anomie/strain theory tradition is one of criminology's longest-running theoretical traditions. As originally proposed by Merton (1968), anomie theory seeks to explain rates of deviance as a function of people's inability to achieve commonly held societal goals. Elaborations of the theory have emphasized how different goals - such as monetary wealth (Merton 1968), middle-class status (Cohen 1955), status in general (Cloward and Olin 1960), achieving masculinity (Greenberg 1977; Messerschmidt 1993), or pursuing leisure activities (Greenberg 1977) - can potentially lead to criminal behaviors. Unlike these theories that have emphasized how macro-structural relations affect goal attainment, general strain theory (GST) attempts to specify the microlevel foundations of how adverse circumstances can lead to criminal behavior.

While all anomie theories emphasize how the inability to achieve goals leads to crime, GST additionally specifies that exposure to adverse stimuli or the loss of valued things can also serve as a motivating forces for criminal behavior (Agnew 2006). The basic argument of GST is that an individual who experiences a strain (a goal blockage, exposure to adverse stimuli, or the loss of valued things) experiences a negative affective state which motivates the individual to engage in coping behavior intended to alleviate the negative affect he or she is experiencing (ibid). Coping behavior need not be criminal, but it is likely to take on a criminal direction depending on the degree to which an individual is disposed to criminal behavior, possesses the ability to legally cope, and potentially experiences high costs for engaging in criminal behavior.

GST is unlike differential association, social learning, and social bonding theories in that it explicitly seeks to elaborate the relationship between emotions and crime.

While emotions could be viewed as rewards or punishments within social learning theory, this aspect of social learning theory has been underdeveloped and only focuses on how negative emotions produce self-regulation – not how they serve as positive motivators for criminal behavior.

The process of formalizing GST is more difficult than the other formalizations which have been presented thus far. Many of the concepts within GST are ambiguous as to whether they are propositional or definitional statements. Gibbs (1972) has long observed this to be a problem in theories which have not been formalized. This problem is particularly evident within GST as the underlying elements of major theoretical concepts contain a tremendous amount of overlap with elements that are subsumed under other concepts. This problem of ambiguity also creates potential problems with relationships being tautological.

Despite these difficulties, the formalization of GST will be organized in a similar manner to previous chapters. First, the theory's assumptions of human nature will be discussed. Second, a theoretical model of GST will be presented, theoretical concepts will be defined, and the theory's causal structure will be discussed. Third, conceptual problems will be discussed that pertain to possible tautologies that are present within the theory. Fourth, GST contains an end-to-end integration with social control and social learning theories. The relationship between GST and these theories will be discussed in regard to potential tautologies that exist as a result of this integration. Fifth, theoretical scope conditions contained within GST will be identified in order to identify limitations in the theory's explanatory power. The final section will conclude the chapter and restate GST in terms of its assumptions of human nature, conceptual definitions, knowledge claims, and scope conditions.

## **Assumptions of Human Nature**

GST rests upon several assumptions of human nature when attempting to explain criminal behavior: pragmatism; hedonism; and plasticity. The theory's view of humans as pragmatic can be traced back to early statements in anomie theory (Cloward and Olin 1960; Cohen 1955; Merton 1968). Within these theoretical statements, individuals actively problem solved and innovated behaviors in the face of the failure to attain positively valued goals. But these early theories also assumed human nature to be moldable as well. In anomie theory (Merton 1968), actors learned both socially approved goals and the appropriate behaviors to be employed pursuing these goals. When individuals encountered a discrepancy between the goals they held and their ability to achieve these goals, they pragmatically adapted. If human nature was static, no such adaptation would be possible. Cohen's (1955) and Cloward's and Ohlin's (1960) elaborations of anomie theory also share these assumption of human nature. When individuals are faced with the inability to achieve goals, they not only innovate, but the particular path individuals follow is contingent upon the resources within a community that foster the learning of particular kinds of innovations. GST shares these assumptions of human nature and further elaborates upon them.

### **Pragmatism**

Versions of strain theory prior to GST have emphasized how criminal behavior can emerge as result of the failure of individuals to attain positively valued goals. Within anomie theory (Merton 1968), when faced with the inability to attain commonly held success goals individuals either reacted by conforming to conduct norms and not innovating (conformity), rejecting conduct norms and continuing to pursue the success goals (innovation), rejecting a success goal but dogmatically subscribing to the behavioral norms regulating its pursuit (ritualism), rejecting both the success goals and behavioral norms

(retreatism), or attempting to restructure the society to have new success goals and new socially approved behaviors to pursue them (revolutions). Although Merton specified only the types of adaptations and not the specific factors leading to one adaptation over another, the very use of the term adaptation connotes that individuals are seen as modifying their behaviors in light of their failure to achieve goals. That is, actors are seen as being pragmatic. Also working in the anomie tradition, Cohen (1955) explicitly states humans are seen as being 'problem solvers' and this theme is also evident in Cloward's and Ohlin's (1960) versions of strain theory as well. GST further develops the pragmatic assumption of anomie theory by specifying that the resources one has access to largely influences the particular adaptations one will engage in when faced with the inability to achieve a commonly held goal.

While early versions of anomie theory have focused on the inability to achieve goals as a motivating force for criminal behavior (Agnew 1992, 2006), GST expands the potential sources driving one to engage in criminal behavior. Within GST (Agnew 2004), in addition to the failure to achieve goals, individuals can also engage in criminal behavior as a result of experiencing an aversive stimuli or losing something of value. These ideas will be further developed in the next section, for now it is important to observe that GST maintains the pragmatic assumption of human nature common to all anomie theories.

### **Hedonism**

In order for an individual to adapt pragmatically to the particular situation, he or she requires some source of motivation. In pragmatism, the problem itself is seen as a motivation, yet this can be specified in greater detail. GST (Agnew 2006) argues that individuals engage in criminal coping behaviors in an effort to mitigate the negative emotions which result from strains. The negative emotions one experiences as a result of



strains can therefore be seen as the problem one seeks to solve. GST is explicit in stating that individuals seek to escape the pressures associated with negative emotions and in doing so emotions are implied to be one way in which an individual can experience pleasure or pain.

The assumption of human nature contained within social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) holds that individuals are hedonistic and prefer pleasure over pain. Within social control theory, criminal behavior is seen as pleasurable and therefore requires no special theory of motivation. Pleasure, however, is only one side of the hedonism coin, and individuals acting hedonistically also seek to avoid or escape displeasures. Since negative emotions are specified to be unpleasing within GST, it is possible for a hedonistic explanation of human behavior to be positively motivated as a result of an individual experiencing displeasure. As a result of this hedonistic assumption that is key to both the theory as a whole and its pragmatic assumption of human nature, GST does not contain assumptions of human nature that are contradictory to differential association, social control, and social learning theories of criminal behavior.<sup>1</sup>

### **Plasticity**

GST also assumes human nature to be plastic. Earlier versions of strain theories demonstrated this assumption in several ways. First, the goals individuals pursued within these theories were a function of socialization processes. Within anomie theory, common success goals were a property of a society and not an individual. Merton (1968) noted that the accumulation of monetary wealth was unique in that one could always attain more. Nonetheless, a goal of monetary acquisition can only occur in societies with money and therefore the goal itself was seen as being heavily contingent on the particular goals available within a society. Cohen (1955) emphasized that individuals pursue “middle-class” status as a goal. Like the pursuit of monetary wealth, middle-class status is highly

contingent upon economic relationships within a given society. Other types of goals have also been emphasized. Greenberg (1977), for example, noted that teenagers often attempt to achieve a masculine identity and such an identity would also be heavily influenced by the particular society in which an individual lives. In all these situations, a particular goal does not exist independent of a larger social group. As such, individuals must learn particular goals.

In addition to goals being structured by a group or society, the legitimate means for pursuing these goals must also be learned. In anomie theory (Merton 1968), the learning of conduct norms is present in several ways. First, conformists are those who have learned both the socially approved goals of a society and the socially approved means for achieving these goals (e.g. conduct norms). But should an individual no longer find satisfaction in either a goal or the means of achieving the goal, adaptations occur. With the incentives to conform under such a situation diminished, individuals become free to engage in forms of deviance. This ability to adopt new goals or new forms of behavior reflects that anomie theory does imply human nature to be plastic. Other anomie theorists also specified how individuals were able to learn how to engage deviant behavior. For example, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) noted that communities contained various resources which could instruct an individual on how to engage in specific kinds of deviant behaviors.

GST also assumes human nature to be plastic and specifies this plasticity in greater detail. Within GST, individuals may learn social skills that help them to cope with aversive stimuli, they may learn how to justify behaviors in the face of certain aversive stimuli, and they may also develop certain personality traits as a result of exposure to adverse circumstances. These items will be discussed in more detail in the next section where GST is more clearly articulated.

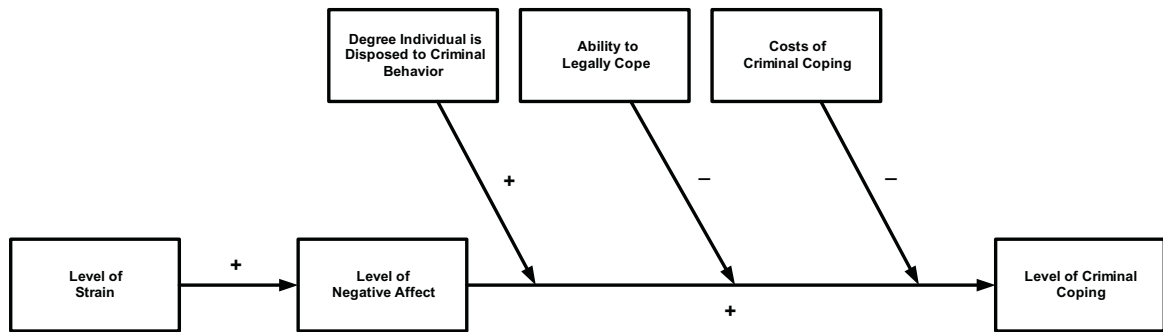
GST shares key assumptions of human nature with the other formalized theories. Unlike anomie theory, GST does not assume everyone is identically socialized (see Kornhauser 1978) and allows for variation in socialization or exposure to strains to differentially result in criminal behavior. The difference between GST and other anomie theories in this regard is a function of GST's microlevel emphasis that does not require individuals to be socialized identically into social values in order to explain how strains can result in criminal behavior. GST simply assumes individuals are plastic, pragmatic, and hedonistic.

### **Theoretical Restatement**

GST (Agnew 1992, 2009) proposes criminal behavior occurs when an individual encounters a strain and utilizes criminal behaviors as a way of coping with the negative emotions generated by strains. GST specifies both a situational theory of criminal behavior and theory of criminality that details how individuals develop predispositions to engage in criminal behavior (Agnew 1992). The core concepts utilized by GST in explaining criminal behavior include: dispositions for criminal coping; strains; criminal coping behavior; one's ability to legally cope; the cost of criminal coping; and negative emotional states. As will be evident when these concepts are more clearly defined, the concepts within GST severely overlap, and it becomes unclear at times whether relationships between concepts are definitional or propositional in nature. Figure 4.1 presents a theoretical model of the basic causal relationships proposed by GST. This model emphasizes GST's situational explanation and omits relationships among moderating concepts, between moderating concepts and strains, and between moderating concepts and negative emotions due to the afore mentioned conceptual ambiguities within the theory. This problem will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

In addition to detailing how strains are theorized to produce criminal outcomes, the theory has been elaborated to specify the macrolevel dynamics associated with GST

**Figure 5.1**  
**General Strain Theory**



*Notes:* Adapted from Agnew (2006: 19).

and how the theory compliments social control and social learning theories of criminal behaviors (Agnew 1999). This formalization will focus solely on the microlevel statement of the theory since the emphasis of this dissertation is on microlevel theories. GST also attempts to integrate with social learning and social control theories. The relationships among these theories will be discussed later in the chapter.

### **Strains**

The concept of strains within GST relates to the degree to which an individual experiences a loss of something of value, is exposed to an aversive stimuli (usually by others), or is unable to achieve a given goal (Agnew 1992, 2006). A strain can be either experienced or anticipated, and can additionally be objective or subjective. *Objective strains* are those circumstances or events which are disliked by most people, while *subjective strains* are those circumstances or events which are subjectively evaluated as being negative depending upon an individual's dispositions, goals, or values (Agnew 2006).

In addition to varying in subjectivity and objectivity, strains also vary in terms of magnitude (Agnew 1992, 2006). The magnitude of a strain pertains to its, degree, centrality, and temporal dimensions. A strain's *degree* depends upon the type of strain experienced (Agnew 1992). In terms of goal blockage, the degree of a strain relates to the discrepancy between one's expectations for realizing a goal and his or her actual achievement of that goal. Those who expect to achieve a goal and fail will experience a high degree of strain compared to those who fail to achieve a goal but have low expectations of success in the first place. In regards to the loss of a valued object, the degree to which a strain is experienced coincides with the amount lost. In such situations, a strain's degree could reflect the monetary or emotional value of a lost object. In terms of one's exposure to aversive stimuli, a strain's degree represents the amount of pain or discomfort experienced by the individual.

*Centrality* refers to the degree to which a strain "threatens the *core* goals, needs, values, activities, and/or identities of the individual" (Agnew 2006: 60).<sup>2</sup> A particular set of values GST emphasizes relating to strains pertains to justice norms (Agnew 2006). As individuals possess a sense of equity in social matters, should a particular strain be viewed as intentional, voluntary, and in violation of a justice norm, the strain is seen as high in centrality and therefore high magnitude. In addition to being the result of the breach of a justice norm, a sense of injustice can also emerge depending upon the degree to which a strain is different from previous occurrences in similar situations or the degree to which others of equal status differentially experience a strain.

Lastly, strains also vary in regards to *temporal dimensions* (Agnew 1992, 2006). These include a strain's: frequency; duration, recency, expected duration, and clustering. Strains that occur frequently, are high in duration, occurred recently, have high levels of expected duration, and are clustered in time are high in magnitude. Strains which are high

in these temporal dimensions can be viewed as being *chronic*. Chronic strains are particularly important within GST as they are more likely to generate particular dispositions within individuals which increase the likelihood of criminal behavior.

As a result of experiencing a strain, individuals experience a negative emotional state which creates within individual a pressure to engage in some form of coping that can alleviate the negative affect an individual is experiencing.

### **Negative Emotional States**

As a result of experiencing a strain, an individual experiences a negative affective state (ibid.). GST specifies an individual is likely to experience the emotions of anger, depression, or fear as a result of experiencing a goal blockage, the loss of a valued item, or experiencing adverse treatment by others. Although GST (Agnew 2006) acknowledges depression and fear to be negative emotions which can result in particular forms of criminal behavior (e.g., drug use, truancy), the theory emphasizes the emotion of anger in motivating criminal behaviors.

Within GST, the emotion of anger is seen as being associated with the emotions of frustration, malicious envy, and jealousy (ibid.). Anger is an emotional state that often results from unjust treatment by others and motivates an individual to correct the perceived injustice (Agnew 2006: 32). GST treats frustration as a subcategory of anger which is experienced when individuals experience difficulty satisfying goal. Like frustration, malicious envy and jealousy are also seen as subcategories of anger within GST. Malicious envy relates to feelings of inferiority, longing, or animosity which arise when an individual believes he or she has a right to things that others possess. Jealousy entails feelings of suspicion, distrust, or fear of loss which are associated with the potential loss of an important relationship to a rival.

Anger and its associated emotions are particularly likely to result in criminal behaviors for several reasons within GST (Agnew 2006). These emotions are aversively experienced by individuals, they create a pressure or motivation for corrective actions, they inhibit an individual's ability to accurately assess situations (ability to legally cope), they increase the likelihood individual will perceive injustices (dispositions for criminal coping), they temporarily reduce one's ability to contemplate the consequences of actions (perceived costs of criminal coping), and they tend to direct actions towards others (as in the case of revenge).

### **Criminal Coping Behavior**

GST proposes that individuals experiencing negative emotional states as a result of strains are likely to engage in criminal behavior as a way of mitigating the negative affect associated with a particular strain (Agnew 1992, 2006). GST observes that several coping strategies are possible as ways to mitigate negative affect. These include behavioral, cognitive, and emotional coping strategies. When an individual engages in a behavioral coping strategy, he or she engages in behaviors that directly target the source of a given strain. This might entail murdering an unfaithful sexual partner or punching the school bully. In both cases the behavior targets the source of a strain. A second way of coping entails an individual cognitively reinterpreting the situation in order to mitigate the negative affect he or she is experiencing. Individuals engaging in cognitive coping strategies try to ignore or minimize the importance of a strain. Cognitive coping strategies include lowering one's standards in the face of a failure to achieve goals, convincing oneself a strain was deserved, or reinterpreting a strain's level of adversity (Agnew 1992). Emotional coping strategies entail an individual engaging in efforts to directly mitigate the negative emotions he or she is experiencing (Agnew 1992, 2006). Emotional coping

strategies include drug use, exercise, meditation, or other strategies intended to lower negative affect. Emotional strategies are often used when other strategies are unavailable.

Behavioral and emotional coping strategies are the only strategies that can directly result in criminal behavior. Acts of revenge intended to retaliate against someone for a perceived wrong or drug abuse can both be behaviors that are criminal in nature. GST fails to provide a definition of crime and instead implies crimes are simply violations of the criminal code. Delinquency, as a special case of crimes, is only used to distinguish juvenile from adult offenses, and GST is intended to explain both criminal and delinquent behaviors (Agnew 1992). Within GST, criminal behavioral or emotional coping strategies (actual behaviors) that occur as a result of an individual experiencing a negative emotional state serve as the *explanandum* of the theory.

Although cognitive coping strategies are not criminal acts within themselves, they may nonetheless allow individuals to engage in criminal behaviors. This may occur as individuals cognitively cope with a given strain and come to the conclusion that criminal behavior is justified within a particular situation (Agnew 2006). Thus, criminal coping strategies may lead to the formation within individuals of beliefs pertaining to the legitimacy of criminal acts within specific situations. This will be discussed in greater detail in the section that specifies the factors which moderate the likelihood of criminal coping.

### **Moderators of Criminal Coping**

GST specifies that several factors moderate the degree to which an individual will engage in cognitive coping strategies as a result of experiencing a negative emotional state which is the result of a strain. The factors that moderate the likelihood of criminal coping include: (1) one's disposition for criminal coping; (2) one's ability to legally cope; (3) and the costs associated with criminal coping.



### *Disposition for Criminal Coping*

Drawing upon the psychological literature on personality traits, GST specifies that a number of psychological traits can predispose an individual to engage in criminal behaviors as response to experiencing negative emotional states associated with strains (Agnew 1992, 2006). These personality traits relate to negative emotionality and low constraint and the belief that criminal behavior is appropriate within a given situation.<sup>3</sup>

The personality traits of negative emotionality and low constraint are the key personality characteristics associated with criminal behavior within GST (Agnew 2006; Agnew, Brezina, Wright, and Cullen 2002). Individuals possessing the personality trait of low constraint tend to be impulsive, risk-taking, reject social norms, and have little regard for the rights and feelings of others. Individuals possessing the personality trait of negative emotionality tend to be easily upset, quick to anger, blame others for their problems, attribute hostile intent to others, have antagonistic interaction styles, be aggressive, and experience intense emotions. In general, individuals possessing the traits of low constraint and negative emotionality are more likely to cope with strains in a criminal manner, act without thinking, lack interpersonal skills, be easily upset, and have actual and perceived lower costs for engaging in criminal behaviors.

Negative emotionality and low constraint are related to criminal behaviors in several ways (Agnew 2006). Individuals possessing these characteristics are more likely to experience subjective or objective strains, they're more likely experience negative emotional states as a result of strains, and their general behavioral patterns reduce their ability to legally cope with strains and the costs of criminal behavior in response to strains.

Another personality characteristic that predisposes an individual to engage in criminal coping behaviors in response to experience strains is the degree to which an individual believes criminal behavior is appropriate means of coping (ibid.). The belief that

criminal behavior as a legitimate response to a strain can either be innovated in response to the strong negative emotions one feels in connection with the strain (e.g., anger and the desire for revenge) or can be the result of social learning processes that occurs through an individual's interactions with delinquent others.

In sum, individuals possessing personality characteristics which dispose them to employ a criminal coping strategies in response to strain are more likely to not only engage in criminal behaviors, but also experience more strains.

#### *Ability to Legally Cope*

Individuals who possess a greater ability to legally cope in response to strains are less likely to engage in criminal coping behaviors (Agnew 1992, 2006). GST identifies a wide array of factors which increase the likelihood an individual will engage in non-criminal coping strategies upon experiencing strains. The items that increase an individual's ability to include certain personality characteristics, one's level of social support, and the amount of resources an individual possesses.

Several personality characteristics decrease the likelihood an individual will engage in criminal coping behaviors (ibid.). An individual's intelligence, problem solving skills, social skills, level of self-efficacy, and level of self-esteem all decrease the likelihood an individual engage in criminal behaviors as a response to strains. GST does not thoroughly define all of these concepts. Nor does it specify precisely how they increase one's ability to legally cope with strains. GST does specify that individuals with a greater sense of self-efficacy in their ability to legally cope will tend to legally cope in response to strains. Additionally, GST states that individuals with high levels of self-esteem are more able to absorb the negative emotions associated with strains. The concept of "problem solving skills" is the most articulated of these concepts within GST. Citing Dodge's and his colleagues' (Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey, Brown, and Gottman 1986) work on

aggression, Agnew (2006: 93) discusses the utilization of problem solving skills within a specific situation as involving an individual searching for cues, correctly interpreting cues, generating responses to cues, considering the consequences of behaviors, and enacting a chosen response. Additionally, Agnew notes the problem solving skills can be basic and relate to such things as maintaining eye contact with others, recognizing the feelings of others, and interacting with others in assertive, but not aggressive, ways.

The likelihood one will engage in criminal coping behavior is also moderated by his or her level of conventional social support (Agnew 1992, 2006). GST (Agnew 1992) identifies three types social support that can decrease the likelihood of criminal coping behaviors. These include instrumental support, informational support, and emotional support, and correlate to the coping strategies previously discussed. Thus, social support can assist an individual in cognitive coping when it entails informational support, an individual's efforts to behaviorally cope can be assisted instrumentally by others, and having others simply listen to one's problems and be there for him or her can provide emotional support. GST further specifies that social support must come from conventional others, such as parents or friends, in order for it to mitigate the likelihood of criminal coping behaviors.

Individuals are also more able to legally respond to strains depending upon the number of resources they have at their disposal (Agnew 1992, 2006). GST conceives of resources primarily in terms of socioeconomic resources. Individuals with greater financial resources tend to have more savings to endure hardships associated with strains, have a greater ability to procure social services (e.g., legal or psychological counseling) to assist them in legally coping with strains, and have higher levels of education that have provided them with increased social skills. Additionally, individuals of high socioeconomic status tend to have more extensive social networks that can help them through difficult times.

One's ability to legally cope also increases what he or she stands to lose if one engages in criminal coping behaviors (Agnew 2006). Engaging in criminal behaviors can cost one his or her job, valued social relations, and generally serve as a detriment to his or her financial status.

### *Costs of Criminal Coping*

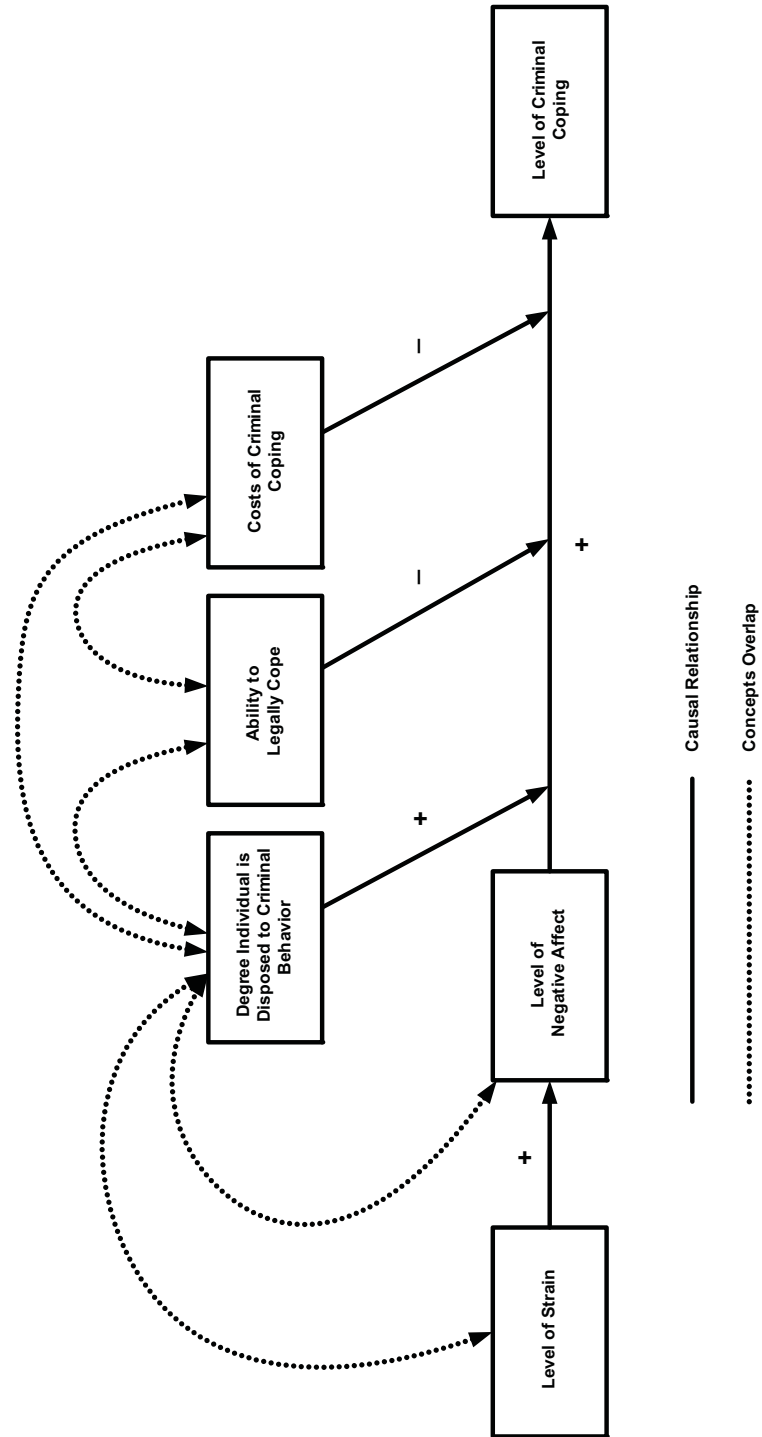
Individuals who possess low costs associated with engaging in criminal behaviors are more likely to engage in criminal coping behaviors (ibid.). Within GST, costs can be internal in the form of the guilt one might feel by engaging in a criminal behavior. Or costs might be external in the form of job loss or the loss of friends. When individuals are faced with a situation in which the costs of criminal coping are low and the rewards are high, individuals are likely to engage in criminal coping behaviors.

GST proposes that individuals engage in criminal behavior as a way of mitigating the negative emotions that accompany the presence of strains. The likelihood of criminal behavior is decreased when individuals possess an increased ability to legally cope with strains and have high costs associated with criminal behavior. The likelihood an individual will engage in criminal behavior, however, increases should an individual possess dispositions, such as the traits of negative emotionality or low constraint, that foster criminal behaviors.

### **Theoretical Ambiguities and Tautologies**

GST contains several theoretical ambiguities and tautologies that make it difficult to distinguish between causal and definitional relationships among concepts. Virtually every major concept within GST overlaps with some other concepts within GST. These areas of ambiguity primarily pertain to distinctions between: (1) strains and negative

**Figure 5.2**  
**Conceptual Overlap Among General Strain Theory Concepts**



emotions; (2) the moderators of criminal coping; and (3) strains and dispositions for criminal coping. These conceptual overlaps are presented in Figure 5.2.

### **Conceptual Ambiguities Between Strains and Negative Emotions**

Several conceptual problems exist between the concepts of strains and negative emotions. First, the emotion of anger plays a central role within strain theory. In describing anger, Agnew (2006) observes anger is connected to perceived injustices and notes: “Anger is associated with feelings of power (potency) and a desire to correct or respond to the perceived injustice” (32). But injustice is not only crucial to understanding anger within GST, it also contributes to the centrality of a strain and therefore influences its magnitude. If an injustice is part of the definitions of both anger and strains, then any relationship between strains and negative emotions that relate to perceived injustices becomes tautological. A strain becomes aversive because the individual experiencing it feels negative affect not because of some intrinsic property of the strain itself. Likewise, frustration overlaps with the degree of a strain as it relates to the discrepancy between one’s expectations and actual outcomes. If frustration is experienced because of the failure to achieve goals, then frustrations and strains are not entirely distinct. Moreover, the case could be made that strains are only subjectively experienced *because* they produce negative affective states. In its current form, GST needs to better distinguish between strains and negative emotions or consolidate these concepts.

### **Conceptual Ambiguities Between Moderating Concepts**

A great deal of conceptual overlap exists between one’s ability to legally cope, an individual’s dispositions towards criminal coping, and the costs associated with criminal coping. One source of conceptual overlap lies within the concepts of dispositions for criminal coping and ability to legally cope. The personality traits of low constraint

and negative emotionality are characterized by tendencies to not contemplate the consequences of criminal actions; to think without acting; to have little regard for feelings or the rights of others; to act in an aggressive manner; to provoke and antagonize others; lack personal skills; blame others for their problems; and frustrate parents (Agnew 2006: 20-22). As previously discussed, effective problem solving skills relate to the ability to interpret cues, consider the consequences of actions, and interpret the feelings of others. In comparing GST's concepts of low constraint and negative emotionality to its concept of problem-solving skills, part of what constitutes the traits of low constraint and negative emotionality is their lack of problem-solving or social skills. Thus, the personality traits of negative emotionality and low constraint can potentially be interpreted in regards to individuals who simply lack social or problem solving skills.

The personality traits of negative emotionality and low constraint also relate to the costs of criminal coping. Because individuals with these traits are more likely to disregard social norms or the rights and feelings of others (Agnew 2006), they are less concerned about the costs associated with criminal coping. People with these traits are unlikely to feel guilt and therefore are less likely to experience internal costs associated with criminal behavior. Additionally, individuals with these traits are less likely to take into account the feelings of others or be concerned with the consequences of their actions and are therefore less subject to the perceived external costs of criminal behavior.

In regards to conceptual ambiguities between one's ability to legally cope and the costs of criminal coping, one's ability to legally cope by definition increases the costs he or she potentially faces in regards to criminal behavior. Individuals with good jobs, social networks, and other resources simply stand to lose more should engage in criminal behavior.

It is evident that there is a tremendous degree of overlap between the concepts theorized by GST to moderate the occurrence of criminal behavior. This overlap makes it virtually impossible to determine if the relationship between ability to legally cope and costs of criminal coping is definitional or propositional. The same problem holds for all other possible combinations of moderating concepts.

### **Conceptual Ambiguities between Dispositions and Strains**

Conceptual ambiguities also exist between the concepts dispositions for criminal coping, strains, and negative emotional states. Agnew (2006) does distinguish between emotional states and traits. While emotional states pertain to a temporary state in which an individual experiences a particular emotion, emotional traits referred to a tendency of certain individuals to experience certain emotions. Individuals possessing the disposition for criminal coping of negative emotionality are more likely to experience negative affect and subjectively perceive strains. The potential problem between distinguishing negative emotions from strains has already been discussed, but is also present here. The relationship between negative emotionality and subjectively perceived strains is potentially tautological because by definition individuals with negative emotionality are more likely to experience events is aversive and attribute malicious intent to others (Agnew et al. 2002). Since individuals with negative emotionality are more likely to experience events as aversive, they are by definition more likely to experience strains. And since they are more likely to experience negative emotions, by definition they strains they do experience will produce negative affect.

These tautologies present within GST serve as major shortcoming of the theory. The empirical implications of these tautologies is that a given measure for one moderator of criminal behavior could also serve as an indicator of other moderators, or even strains

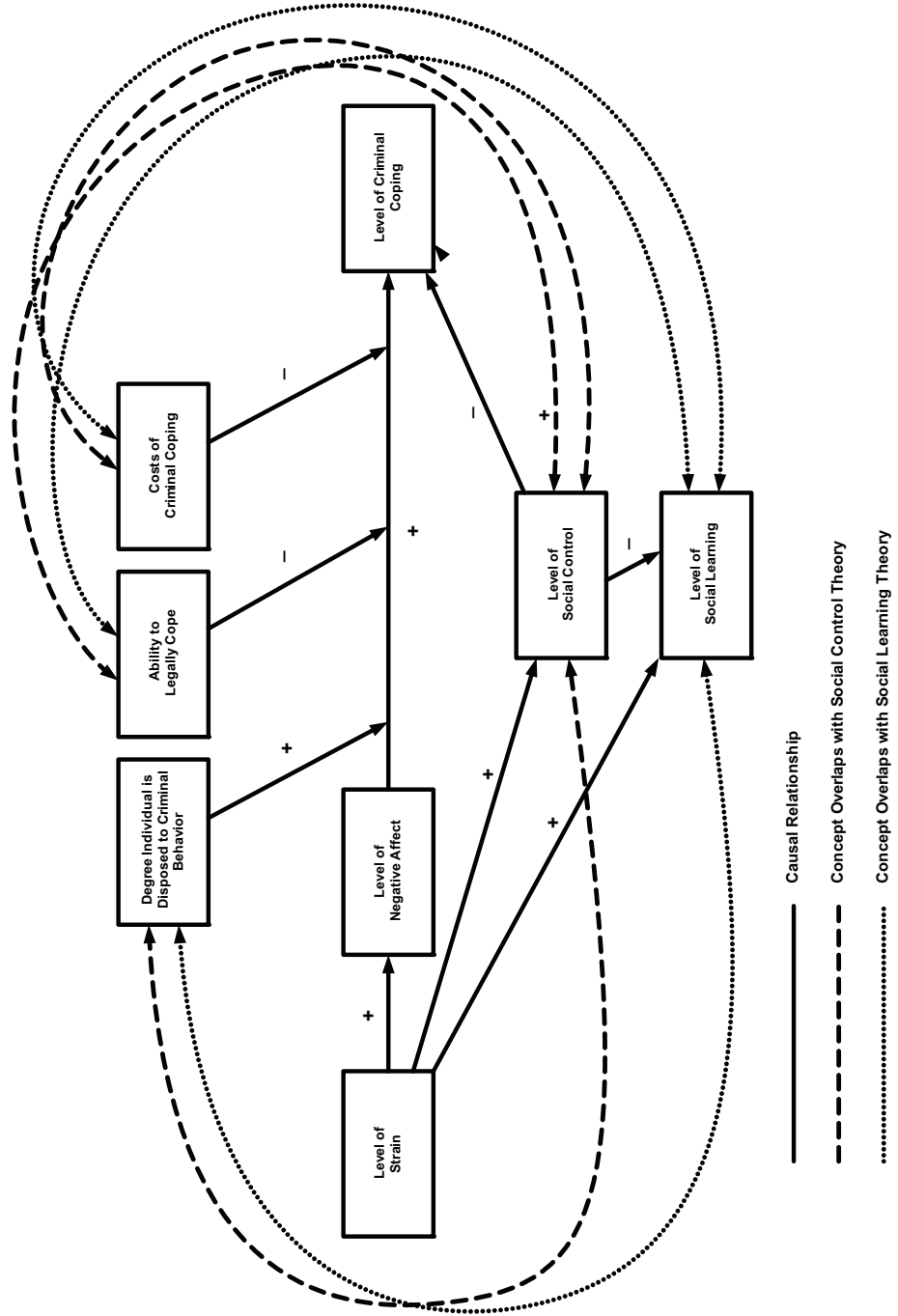


or emotions. It is unclear how the trait of negative emotionality, for example, could be measured independently of one's levels of subjective strains or negative emotions. While it may be possible to unpack these concepts in order to minimize theoretical tautologies, doing so would require abandoning the over-encompassing conceptual categories of dispositions for criminal coping, ability to legally cope, and costs of criminal coping. In their current form, these moderating concepts are not mutually exclusive and serve more as a set of heuristics that organize a multi-factor approach to criminal coping than as a set of clearly defined concepts that are part of a logically consistent theory.

These conceptual problems are further present in GST's attempt to demonstrate how theory relates to social control and social learning theories.

Numerous conceptual issues plague GST in its current form. While some of these problems are tautological in nature, others simply stem from GST's failure to clearly delineate boundaries between concepts. GST's origins in strain theory and its strong emphasis on incorporating insights from other disciplines (particularly psychology), are both its greatest strength and weakness. While expanding the concept of strains to incorporate the loss of a valued item and experiencing aversive stimuli has greatly expanded the scope of strain theory, its development of factors seen as moderating the relationship between negative emotional states and criminal behavior remains less complete. Under its current form, the factors moderating the relationship between negative emotions and criminal behavior are nothing more than loose categories that serve to organize a variety of predictors for criminal behavior. These predictors can be loosely viewed to conform to the factors identified by GST, but they are really predictors of disparate theoretical approaches that are employed in GST in a multi-factor manner. The concept of dispositions for criminal behavior is derived from research grounded in psychology, which has little theoretical

**Figure 5.3**  
**Conceptual Overlap Between General Strain Theory Concepts and Social Control and Social Learning Theory Concepts**



relationship to GST's sociological concepts, such as socioeconomic status. Additionally, each moderating concept is potentially nothing more than list of predictors of criminal behaviors that may be broadly correlated to other predictors within the category, but GST does not adequately specify *logical* or theoretical connections between these predictors. Thus, like the multifactor approaches Sutherland was so critical of when he formulated differential association theory, GST, while grounded in strain theory, relies upon a various predictors drawn from disparate theoretical perspectives to explain why individuals engage in criminal behavior as result of experiencing strains.

### **Integrative Tautologies**

While GST was originally formulated as an elaboration of the strain tradition and avoided integrative efforts (see Agnew 1992), additional elaborations of the theory sought to more explicitly emphasize how GST could compliment social control and social learning explanations of criminal behavior. In demonstrating the complementary nature of GST to these theories, Agnew (2006) observed that social control theory emphasized the absence of relationships to conventional individuals or institutions and social learning theory focused on the positive relationships one has with delinquent others. Agnew proposed that because GST focuses on how individuals are pressured into crime, it could supplement these theories by demonstrating how strains can affect one's relationships with conventional others or motivate an individual to join delinquent groups as a means of trying to find social support for his or her problems. Figure 5.3 displays the theorized relationships among social control, social learning, and general strain theories.

GST (Agnew 2006) specifies that strains can lead to reduced social control and foster the social learning of dispositions for criminal coping. Strains that are chronic, such as parental abuse, can weaken the social control to which one is exposed. Likewise, temporary strains, such as anger towards an attachment figure, can temporarily reduce

social controls. As a result of reduced social controls, individuals are more free to associate with delinquent others, and are also more free to engage in criminal behavior. Strains also can directly foster the social learning of criminal behavior. Individuals who experience strains, and have lack the ability to legally cope, are likely to see delinquent groups as a potential unconventional form of social support. In interacting with such groups, individual learn criminal coping behaviors and the belief such behaviors are justified. Additionally, certain strains, such as parental abuse, provide individuals with behavioral models that directly foster the social learning of criminal behavior.

In attempting to elucidate the theoretical relationships between general strain, social control, and social learning theories, Agnew goes beyond discussing how these theories might operate in parallel and attempts to provide an end-to-end integration of how social control and social learning theories affect GST concepts (ibid.). These relationships are omitted from Figure 5.3 because they produce the same conceptual problems that were previously observed in endogenous GST concepts. Social control and social learning theories both contain concepts that overlap with concepts found within GST and the tautologies that result from this problem will be further explicated.

### *Social Control Theory*

Social control theory contains several concepts that are also present within GST. First, social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) posits individuals with a greater commitment to the conventional order are less likely to engage in criminal behavior. This concept of commitment is also present within GST's concept of costs of criminal coping. As both concepts relate to the things one potential might lose by engaging in criminal behavior, these concepts are redundant in the end-to-end elaboration. Agnew (2006) notes that the lower one's social control, the lower his or her costs will be for engaging in criminal behavior. Since concepts pertaining to the cost of criminal behavior are present

in both theories, it is unclear if an absence of social control leads to less costs for criminal coping by definition or whether these are seen as being causally related. If there are seen as being causally related, the relationship would be fundamentally tautological. If the relationship is purely definitional, then the concept of costs of criminal coping can be demonstrated to be similar to commitments within social control theory independent of any attempt at theoretical integration.

Social control theory's concept of attachment also overlaps with GST's concept of social support. Chapter 4's formalization of social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) discussed how one's attachments to his or her parents was evident when one sought their opinions, shared their thought or feeling with them, or had them clarify rules or other things an individual didn't understand. The concept of attachment within social control theory is very similar to GST's conception of conventional social support, which is subsumed under the broader concept of ability to legally cope. GST (Agnew 2006) specifies that social support provided by conventional others can provide informational or instrumental support that can ameliorate the negative affect experienced as result of strains. Insofar as it is informational, it seems to correspond with attachment relationship where individuals share their opinions or clarify rules. Additionally, the rules or *beliefs* one learns could represent the results of cognitive coping efforts that serve are referred to as social skills in GST. Insofar as the support is purely emotional, it could also correspond to attachment relationship where feelings are shared.

### *Social Learning Theory*

Social Learning theory (Akers 2009) also contains concepts that overlap with concepts within GST. First, the concept of costs of criminal coping overlaps with social learning theories concept of anticipated reinforcements. Although social learning theory tends to emphasize criminal behavior as being rewarding, anticipated reinforcements in

the form of anticipated punishments can deter an individual from engaging in criminal behavior. Second, GST's concept of conventional social support also is represented in social learning theory. The social support one receives can be seen within social learning theory as a negative reward (the withdrawal of an adverse stimulus) insofar as instrumental supports reduce the negative emotions one is experiencing as a result of a strain. Insofar as the support is only emotional, it also mitigates the negative emotions one is feeling because of a strain. Additionally, the actual advice or knowledge transmitted, while seen as social skills within GST, could be viewed as prosocial attitudes or definitions within social learning theory - that is, definitions unfavorable to criminal behavior. Third, GST's concept of dispositions for criminal coping overlaps with social learning theory's concept of definitions. One's dispositions for criminal coping include the belief that criminal behavior is warranted or justified. This corresponds with social learning theory's concept of neutralizations and attitudes. The personality traits of negative emotionality and low constraints that also serve as dispositions for criminal behavior within GST could also be re-expressed within social learning theory as being packages of attitudes that involve particular orientations towards others (e.g., aggressiveness) or willingness to blame others for their problems.

Lastly, GST specifies that social learning process can lead one to experience strains since the delinquent groups in which one participates can lead to numerous undesirable outcomes (Agnew 2006). The concept of strains with GST corresponds to social learning theory's concept of punishments. Within social learning theory (Akers 2009), punishments are positive or negative. Positive punishments involve one being exposed to a noxious stimulus, while negative punishments represent the loss a positive stimulus. Since GST conceives of strains as pertaining to goal blockages, experiencing aversive stimuli, and losing of something of value, the concept of strains perfectly corresponds to the concept of punishment within social learning theory. Whereas exposure to adverse

stimuli and the loss of something of value correspond to positive and negative punishment, goal blockage could be seen within social learning theory as relating to anticipated negative punishment. That is, the anticipate loss of something that is seen as being rewarding. With this in mind, GST could be seen as not being distinct from social learning theory, but rather as attempting to provide an explanation of how punishments can positively motivate criminal behavior. Since all the moderators with GST have corresponding concepts within social learning theory, GST could be seen as an elaboration of social learning theory that specifies how various definitions (e.g., attitudes) and reinforcements (e.g., social support and costs of criminal coping) affect the likelihood an individual will engage in criminal behavior to escape a punishment. This is not to say it *is* such an elaboration, as GST does emphasize social skills and other dimensions of cognition and social support not present within social learning theory, but it would be possible to attempt to respecify it as a special case of learning theory should an individual translate concepts from GST into social learning theory.

In addition to possessing overlapping endogenous concepts, concepts within GST also overlap significantly with concepts contained within social control and social learning theories. As such, the end-to-end integration of GST with these theories creates problems, as concepts are redundant within these theories. Insofar as GST is simply highlighting conceptual similarities, this overlap is not a problem. This overlap is problematic, however, as GST argues social control and social learning processes lead to GST processes and *vice versa*. The conceptual problems that have been discussed that are present both within the theory and with its connections to other theories represent a major shortcoming in logical consistency of general strain theory. Have discussed these limitations, it is now important to turn to limitations within GST that are a result of the theory's scope.

### **Scope Conditions**

GST primarily has two scope conditions that limit its explanatory power. In order for an individual to become motivated to commit a crime, GST argues that an individual must experience negative affect as result of experienced or anticipate goal blockage, exposure to aversive stimuli, or loss of a valued item. Criminal behavior that occurs as a result of cultural conflict (ignorance of a law) or because a criminal behavior is in itself rewarding is beyond the scope of GST. A second scope condition relates to GST's failure to specify how individuals come to value a goal or why individuals perceive particular things as being rewards. GST specifies that subjective strains emerge from learning processes and as a result individuals may experience strains that other individuals do not. However, GST emphasizes the ability to perceive the strains and underemphasizes why an individual values a goal or pursues a specific reward in the first place. While GST acknowledges individuals have multiple goals and may differ from others in their goals, it does not explain why a particular person has a particular goal. The current statement of the theory only pertains to learning processes as they relate to coping behaviors and not as they relate to the initial rewards or goals an individual pursues. Therefore, while an individual may possess certain goals or desires, the reason why an individual possesses these is beyond the scope of GST.

### **Conclusion**

GST represents a major advancement in the strain theory tradition. In extending the concept of strains beyond goal blockages to include the loss of something of value and experiencing an aversive stimuli, GST expands the source of motivations for criminal behavior. GST also specifies the nature of the emotions one experiences as a result of strains and which factors moderate the likelihood an individual engage in criminal cop-



ing behaviors an effort to reduce the negative emotions associated with the strain. But these elaborations are not without their shortcomings. In order identify the various factors that moderate the likelihood an individual will engage in criminal coping behaviors as a result of experiencing strains, GST has drawn upon psychological and sociological factors which do not share a common theoretical base. The end result of this mixture is a multi-factor approach that specifies a variety of factors believed to moderate the likelihood of criminal coping which are only united conceptually by the fact they are believed to moderate criminal coping. While they are loosely classified under categories of dispositions for criminal coping, ability to legally cope, and costs of criminal coping – these categories are very loose, highly permeable, and do little to organize the underlying predictors of criminal coping in a theoretical manner. Instead, they represent a multi-factor approach which is informed by numerous theoretical insights that have not been theoretically integrated.

Strain theories have long faced theoretical challenges in their development. Efforts to elaborate GST utilizing an end-to-end approach with social control and social learning theories (e.g., Elliot et al. 1979) were criticized on the grounds but they produced logically inconsistent theories (Hirschi 1979, 1989). Theoretical efforts to elaborate strain theories highlight the need for criminologists to distinguish between basic and applied science. Whereas basic science seeks to identify and test theoretical principles in order to arrive at logically consistent and internally valid theory, applied science instead draws upon multiple theoretical frameworks in order to maximally explain empirical variations pertaining to a particular phenomenon. Efforts by Elliot and his colleagues (Elliot et al. 1979; Elliot et al. 1985) have been interpreted by criminologists to be an exercise in basic science and as result criticized for being logically inconsistent (Hirschi 1989); however, the moment one's goal becomes to maximize explained variation over identifying and isolating relationships between theoretical concepts, the research inherently becomes

applied. GST also illustrates this problem. In its current form, it fails to clearly articulate relationships between key theoretical concepts and additionally fails to clearly define them or delineate the boundaries. Instead, it emphasizes identifying all factors related to criminal coping regardless of their theoretical relationships with one another.

GST's effort at integration also reflects this applied approach. Whereas GST could have borrowed insights from social control and social learning theories and reinterpreted them as new concepts that were logically consistent with GST, Agnew (2006) instead resorted to an end-to-end integration approach that reproduced the logical problems for which integrative efforts have been so criticized.

In concluding this chapter, a theoretical restatement of GST is proposed a propositional form. As a result of conceptual and propositional ambiguities among key theoretical concepts, the proposed restatement is limited in scope to only those relationships which are most clearly defined as being causal in nature. Additionally, it is impossible to clearly define all theoretical concepts and this restatement is unable to exercise the logical problems from GST. As such, concepts are defined in a manner consistent with conceptualization presented within GST (Agnew 1992, 2006; Agnew et al. 2002), regardless of whether the definition is inherently tautological or teleological.

### **Theoretical Restatement**

#### *Assumptions*

- A1. Human nature is assumed to be pragmatic and capable of innovation within GST.
- A2. Human nature is assumed to be hedonistic within GST. Specifically, GST assumes find certain situations or event to be aversive and engage in activities to minimize displeasure when in aversive situations or circumstance.
- A3. Human nature is plastic.

### *Conceptual Definitions*

- D1. *Strain* – A situation or set of circumstances in which an individual experiences, or anticipates experiencing, a goal blockage, the loss of something of value, or being exposed to aversive stimuli.
- A. *Objective Strains* - Strains that are disliked by most people.
  - B. *Subjective Strains* – Strains that are negatively evaluated as a result of one's dispositions, goals, or values.
  - C. *Magnitude of a strain* – The strength of a strain along the dimensions of degree, centrality, and temporality.
    - i. *Degree* – The strength of a strain as it pertains to the discrepancies between one's expectations and outcomes (goal blockage), the value of a lost thing of value, or the amount of displeasure one feels in response to the strain.
    - ii. *Centrality* – The degree to which a strain threatens the goals, needs, values, activities, and identities of an individual.
    - iii. *Temporality* – The frequency, duration, recency, expected duration, and clustering of a strain.
- D2. *Negative Emotional State* – A state in which an individual experiences the emotions of anger (including frustration, malicious envy, and jealousy), depression, or fear.
- D3. *Dispositions for criminal coping* – The psychological characteristics of an individual that increase the likelihood and individual will experience strains and will cope with negative affective states through criminal behavior.
- D4. *Ability to Legally Cope* – The personality characteristics, resources, and social support one has which promotes pro-social coping strategies.
- D5. *Costs of Criminal Behavior* – The internal and external aversive experiences one would likely have should he or she engage in criminal behavior.
- D6. *Criminal Behavior* – Behaviors that are classified as criminal under the criminal code, including both juvenile and adult offenses.

### *Knowledge Claims*

- P1. The level of negative affect an individual experiences is positive function of the magnitude of the strain he or she experiences.
- P2. The amount of criminal behavior an individual will engage in is a
1. Positive multiplication function of the level of negative affect and the degree to which an individual possesses dispositions for criminal coping
  2. Individual has the ability to cope with strains in a legal manner.
  3. Negative multiplication function of the level of negative affect and one's costs for criminal behavior.

### *Scope Conditions*

- SC1. Criminal Behaviors that occur in the absence of negative affect or strains are beyond the scope of the theory.
- SC2. The dynamics associated with the formation of goals or values are beyond the scope of GST.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> GST does not differ for social control or social learning theories in terms of hedonism; however, it does differ from differential association theory in terms of innovation. Whereas differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) explicitly states humans do not innovate criminal behaviors, GST, with its pragmatic assumption of human nature, assumes individuals are capable of behavioral innovation.

<sup>2</sup> The degree dimension of a strain can possibly be subsumed under centrality. If individuals possess needs surrounding the desire to not have things of value taken from them, not be exposed to a person stimuli, or not have their goals blocked, then a strains degree can simply be expressed in terms of its centrality.

<sup>3</sup> Agnew (2006) also specifies that experiencing chronic strains can produce within an individual emotional trait that predisposes individual to experience a specific emotion in

response to strains. Agnew primarily discusses emotional traits in regards to the personality traits of negative emotionality and therefore is not discussed separately.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Theoretical Evaluation**

Differential association, social learning, social control, and general strain theories all provide a microlevel explanations of the etiology of criminal behavior. In this chapter, the explanatory power of these theories will be evaluated and compared in order to identify their strengths and limitations. These theories will be evaluated in terms of constraints related to their assumptions of human nature, scope conditions, *explanans*, and *explananda*. A discussion of other means of evaluating these theories will be reserved for the final chapter.

#### **Human Nature and Scope Conditions**

Although the theoretical formalizations presented have distinguished between assumptions of human nature and scope conditions, this distinction was only made because assumptions of human nature have served as a cornerstone to theoretical elaboration/integration debate in criminology (e.g., Hirschi 1989). Assumptions of human nature can also be treated as theoretical scope conditions and therefore can also limit the explanatory power of a theory. Interpreted this way, the predictions of a given criminological theory hold under only those conditions where it's assumptions of human nature are met. The primary difference between the explicated assumptions of human nature and the identified theoretical scope conditions is that assumptions of human nature pertain to scope conditions that are intrinsic to the human organism, whereas the identified scope conditions have primarily emphasized dynamics external to humans. In discussing the limitations of the formalized criminological theories, this distinction will be preserved.

## **Human Nature**

The criminological theories formalized have both agreements and disagreements in terms of their assumptions of human nature. In terms of agreements, differential association, social learning, social control, and general strain theories agree that human nature is hedonistic and plastic. Within differential association theory (Sutherland 1947), all human behavior is motivated by biological drives that are hedonistic in nature. Social learning theory's (Akers 1985, 2009) reliance upon reinforcements as a mechanism of learning and behavioral motivation indicates the theory assumes human nature to be hedonistic because humans fundamentally prefer rewards over punishments. Social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) explicitly states humans are hedonistic and therefore is not different from differential association or social learning theories in this regard. Lastly, general strain theory (Agnew 1992, 2006) also emphasizes human nature to be hedonistic in that individuals are willing to engage in a wide array of behaviors in order to escape from the punishing effects of negative emotions that are associated with strains. Although general strain theory does not emphasize the pursuit of pleasure, it does emphasize the avoidance or amelioration of pain.

These theories also agree that human nature is plastic. Differential association and social learning theories explicitly emphasize how individuals learn to engage in criminal behavior. Likewise, social control theory states that socialization processes can instill beliefs within an individual pertaining to the legitimacy of the conventional order or the morality of specific acts. General strain theory also emphasizes plasticity in that individuals can develop durable dispositions favorable to criminal behavior as a result of previous experiences, or people can also learn social skills that enable them to legally cope with strains.

Despite these similarities, these theories differ in regard to human nature in two ways. First, these theories do not treat the implications of hedonism and plasticity equally.

Differential association, social learning, and general strain theories all acknowledge that individuals can learn either conventional or criminal forms of behavior. Social control theory, on the other hand, specifies that the learning of conventional behaviors are important in explaining criminal behavior. Thus, while its view of plasticity is similar to the other formalized theories, the potential *explanans* it can derive from this assumption are more limited.

A second way in which these theories differ in regards to human nature pertains to behavioral innovations and the degree to which individuals are seen as pragmatic. General strain theory (Agnew 1992, 2006) holds that individuals are capable of innovation when attempting to cope with strains. Social learning and social control theories would likely contend that behavioral innovations are simply those behaviors that maximize pleasure and minimize pain within a novel situation, but they nonetheless do not explicitly address the issue of behavioral innovation. Differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) explicitly states that behaviors must be learned through interactions with others and that criminal behavior is *not* the result of behavioral innovation. This is particularly interesting because Sutherland (1947) does acknowledge that social reorganization along new lines often follows after periods of social disorganization. Despite differential association theory's heritage, it explicitly denies the possibility of behavioral innovation.

### **Scope Conditions**

Differential association, social learning, social control, and general strain theories contain numerous scope conditions that limit their explanatory power. As etiological theories of criminal behavior, these theories all assume a particular behavior has been legally or socially defined as being criminal or otherwise prohibited; however, they do not provide an explanation as to why a particular act is defined as criminal. Beyond this



one common scope condition, these theories contain numerous scope conditions which uniquely limit their abilities to explain criminal behavior.

In addition to differential association theory's inability to account for behavioral innovations that are criminal, the theory also cannot explain crime in undifferentiated societies, does not specify learning mechanisms, and is unable to explain why an individual has a particular network of associations. Sutherland (1947) saw social differentiation as leading to cultural heterogeneity, and this was seen as the primary source of criminal behavior in modern societies. Based upon differential association theory's assumption of cultural heterogeneity, the theory's explanatory power does not extend to undifferentiated societies. Differential association theory also does not specify the precise mechanisms of learning other than noting that the associations through which definitions are learned vary in frequency, duration, intensity, and priority. While social learning theory has elaborated differential association theory and specified learning mechanisms, these remain beyond the scope of differential association theory. A final scope condition of differential association theory is that it fails to specify why an individual is exposed to particular associations. Although Sutherland (1947) does note differential social organization can create a context in which individuals are exposed to definitions favorable to criminal behavior, an individual's personal networks can differ from the networks of others and individuals within a particular community may be differentially exposed to criminogenic definitions as a result of their different associations (*ibid.*). The theory does not explain why some individuals are exposed to more criminal definitions than others and thus this remains beyond the scope of the theory.

Social learning theory also contains several limitations in its ability to explain criminal behavior. As a microlevel theory, social learning theory does not explain the distribution of associations, reinforcements, or vicarious reinforcements within one's environment. The theory does not also account for potential variations in biology or physi-

ology that can affect either the nonsocial reinforcers one experiences (e.g. chronic pain leading to marijuana use) or how an individual learns or interacts with the environment (e.g., intelligence). Lastly, social learning theory fails to identify learning mechanisms not associated with operant conditioning or vicarious learning. One source of learning not related to these two processes is learning through the use of analogy, metaphor, and induction (see Holyoak and Nisbett 1988). Individuals attempting to act within novel situations often utilize metaphors or analogies to induce behavioral solutions to a situational problem. This process is beyond the scope of behaviorism and therefore social learning theory as well.

Beyond the scope conditions associated with social control theory's assumptions of human nature, the theory is also limited in explaining crime in undifferentiated societies. Social control theory assumes cultural homogeneity and value-consensus within a given society and therefore is unable to explain crime in culturally pluralistic societies. In such societies, attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs would be differentially aligned depending upon one's group memberships.

General strain theory also contains several limiting scope conditions. First, the theory's emphasis on negative emotions as positive motivators for criminal behavior limits the theory's ability to explain criminal behaviors that are not motivated by negative emotions or the strains that produce them. Thus, crimes that are the result of anticipated positive rewards (e.g., recreational drug use) are beyond the scope of the theory. A second scope condition pertains to general strain theory's failure to specify why an individual has particular goals. While the theory does state that some strains are subjective, and articulates how harsh punishment can lead an individual to learn to perceive more subjective strains, general strain theory does not specify how one develops subjective goals that can potentially serve as a source of strains related to goal blockages.

**Table 6.1**  
**Scope Conditions of Formalized Criminological Theories**

<i>Locus of Scope Condition</i>	<i>Differential Association Theory</i>	<i>Social Learning Theory</i>	<i>Social Control Theory</i>	<i>General Strain Theory</i>
1. <i>Microlevel</i>	<p>Hedonism</p> <p>Plasticity</p> <p>Learning process is ambiguous</p> <p>Incapable of Innovation</p>	<p>Hedonism</p> <p>Plasticity</p> <p>Learning process is explicitly stated</p> <p>Fails to account for learning not subsumed under operant conditioning or vicarious learning</p>	<p>Hedonism</p> <p>Plasticity<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Learning process is ambiguous</p>	<p>Hedonism<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Plasticity</p> <p>Learning process is ambiguous</p> <p>Pragmatism</p> <p>Fails to account for presence of goals</p>
2. <i>Macrolevel</i>	<p>Only explains microlevel behaviors</p> <p>Criminal behavior must be defined a priori</p> <p>Society must be culturally heterogeneous</p> <p>Does not explain why an individual possesses certain associations</p>	<p>Only explains microlevel behaviors</p> <p>Criminal behavior must be defined a priori</p> <p>No assumptions about cultural heterogeneity</p> <p>Does not explain why an environment has a particular distribution of associations</p>	<p>Only explains microlevel behaviors</p> <p>Criminal behavior must be defined a priori</p> <p>Society must be culturally homogenous</p>	<p>Only explains microlevel behaviors</p> <p>Criminal behavior must be defined a priori</p> <p>No assumptions about cultural heterogeneity</p> <p>Does not account for macro-structural sources of strain or goals</p>

*Notes:*

<sup>1</sup>General strain theory limits its view of hedonism to only relate to pain avoidance.

<sup>2</sup>Social control theory only assumes plasticity in regards to socialization processes. Social control theory denies the possibility that motives can be learned.

## **Limitations of Explanatory Power**

The assumptions of human nature and theoretical scope conditions identified within differential association, social learning, social bonding, and general strain theories all serve to limit the explanatory power of these theories. Table 6.1 contains a summary of the scope conditions present within each theory which limits its explanatory power. Within the table, assumptions of human nature have been reconceptualized as scope conditions. This is not only because assumptions of human nature can limit the explanatory power of a theory, but is also because the term human nature connotes an essentialist and metaphysical view of human nature that is fundamentally unfalsifiable. This reclassification allows research to potentially relax scope conditions pertaining to human nature in order to determine the degree to which a given assumption impacts a theory's empirical predictions. The identified scope conditions pertain to theoretical limitations that exist at the micro and macro levels of analysis.

### *Microlevel Scope Conditions*

*Hedonism.* All formalized theories contain scope conditions relating to hedonism. Should an actor not be acting in accordance with the avoidance of pain or the pursuit of pleasure, these theories would be limited in their ability to explain the actor's behavior. But the implications of this scope condition is of limited utility. Avoiding any possible debate about hedonism and altruism, such as scope condition is essentially meaningless as any particular act could potentially be interpreted as being hedonistic. This scope condition is only limiting in regard to general strain theory because the theory only emphasizes explaining criminal behaviors which are motivated by strains (or unpleasant experiences). This emphasis inhibits the theory's ability to explain criminal behavior that is not related to the avoidance of pain and therefore is more limited in its explanatory power than differential association, social learning, and social control theories.

*Plasticity.* Plasticity is another scope condition present within each of the formalized theories. While differential association, social learning, social control, and general strain all acknowledge individuals can learn to both refrain from or engage in criminal behaviors, they differ in terms of the degree to which an individual learns motivations to engage in criminal behavior. Differential association theory specifies that the directions of natural attitudes are learned, not the motivations themselves. Social learning theory contends that individuals can learn to find things rewarding or punishing, and therefore motivations can be learned. General strain theory locates motivation within negative emotions; however, individuals can learn to perceive subjective strains that produce negative emotions. Social control theory contends motivations are simply hedonistic desires and are not learned.

Differential association theory and social learning theory are less limited in explanatory power in terms of plasticity and motivation than the other formalized theories. While differential association theory specifies that only the direction of motives are learned, since its conception of attitudes are derived from the concept of natural attitudes within Thomas and Znaniecki ([1927] 1966a, [1927] 1966b), and natural attitudes are hedonistic and can be shaped and redirected through socialization, there is little to differentiate differential association from social learning theory in terms of plasticity and the learning of motives. General strain theory is more limited in terms of plasticity only in that it solely considers negative emotions and how learning relates to them when explaining criminal behavior. Social control theory is more limited than the other theories in terms of plasticity and the learning of motives. While social control theory specifies individuals can learn moral beliefs prohibiting acts, it denies that motivations can be learned for either a criminal or non-criminal act because all motivation is hedonistic and there is no more of a natural motivation for criminal behavior than there is for conforming behavior (Hirschi [1969] 2004: 32-33). Thus, while differential association, social learn-

ing, and general strain theories all acknowledge learning can positively shape motivation, social control theory only acknowledges socialization can constrain it. Within social control theory, motivation is not redirected, it is suppressed.

Since differential association, social learning<sup>1</sup>, or general strain theories all assume human behavior *and* motivations are plastic, these theories would be unable to explain the criminal behavior of individuals who possess a decreased ability to learn. For social control theory, since motivation is seen as being constant across individuals, and learning is important only insofar as relates to socialization within conventional society, individuals with learning deficits would experience lower social control as a result of their decreased capacity to learn. Therefore such individuals would remain within the scope of social control theory.

*Specification of Learning Process.* With the exception of social learning theory, all formalized theories fail to specify learning processes. Within differential association theory, the learning process is ambiguous and only specifies the modalities of interaction which are theorized to facilitate learning. The theory does not explicate how learning actually occurs. Social control theory states individuals learn moral beliefs as a result of socialization processes; however, the theory is silent on how learning works. General strain theory also fails to specify how individuals learn to legally cope with strains or form dispositions that increase the likelihood of criminal coping. While the theory does acknowledge that learning processes occur and specifies the types of events which might cause an individual to learn dispositions favorable to criminal behavior (e.g., subjection to harsh and inconsistent discipline), the theory nonetheless fails to specify a learning process.<sup>2</sup> The failure of differential association, social control, and general strain theories to specify learning processes translates into these theories have been less explanatory power than social learning theory.

Even though social learning theory does specify how individuals learn to engage in or refrain from criminal behavior, the theory's explanatory power related to learning is limited by its reliance on operant conditioning and vicarious learning principles. Another source of potential learning relates to induction and how individuals use analogies and metaphors to learn in novel situations (see Holyoak and Nisbett 1988). The use of analogies and metaphors are purely cognitive operations which are beyond the scope of social learning theory in its current form. Thus, social learning theory is limited to explaining only those behaviors which are learned through operant conditioning or vicarious learning principles.

*Behavioral Innovation and Goal Formation.* Several scope conditions also exist which are unique to particular theories and operate at the individual level. First, differential association theory explicitly denies the ability of individuals to innovate behaviors, while general strain theory sees actors as capable of engaging in behavioral innovation. While this would seem to indicate *prima facie* that general strain theory has greater power than differential association theory along this dimension, general strain theory fails to specify how behavioral innovations occur within its *explanan*. Thus, any potential benefit in explanatory power general strain theory may gain from its acknowledgment of human pragmatism is lost as a result of its failure to specify how behavioral innovations might occur. Second, general strain theory fails to account for why an individual possesses particular goals. While the theory argues some goals are objective and universal in nature, it also states goals can be subjective and vary among individuals. The theory does not explain the source of goals. Social control theory would simply explain goals in terms of salient hedonistic desires. Social learning theory would explain goals in terms of anticipated reinforcements which are the result of previous reinforcements or vicarious learning. And differential association theory could explain goals in terms of learned

definitions that are the products of interactions with others. General strain theory takes a subjective goal as being a given and does not specify its origin.

### *Macrolevel Scope Conditions*

In addition to limitations of these theories' explanatory power that exist at the individual level, the formalized theories also contained several scope conditions that are external in nature to an actor. The limitations pertain to: (1) how behaviors become defined as being criminal; (2) why an individual has a particular associations; (3) a society's assumed level of differentiation; and (4) an overall concern for microlevel forces and a general disregard for macrolevel dynamics.

*Criminalization.* All formalized theories assume a given act is defined to be criminal *a priori*. None of these theories detail the process that leads to particular acts being defined as being prohibited by a group or legally proscribed. While these theories differ in terms of whether their *explanandum* must be a crime (differential association and general strain theories), an act of deviance (social learning theory), or an act punishable by society (social control theory), all theories assume an act has previously been defined as having a prohibited status.

*Associations.* differential association does not provide an explanation of why individuals possess particular social networks or associations (associations include exposure to media or other non-personal form of interaction). The theory does not account for why an individual has a particular set of associations, although Sutherland's (1947) conception of differential social organization does acknowledge that particular communities may have different distributions of particular types of associations. Social learning theory accounts for individual's association insofar as they provide individual with rewards. General strain theory provides an explanation for associations and argues individuals



will associate with deviant others as a means of trying to cope with the negative emotions associated with strains in the absence of conventional forms of social support. Social control theory also explains delinquent associations as simply being a function of the absence of social controls. Within social control theory, associating with delinquent others necessarily follows from the absence of social controls. As a result of differential association theory's failure to specify why an individual possesses a specific network of social relations, it is more limited in scope than social learning, social control, and general strain theories.

*Cultural Differentiation.* Another limitation in the explanatory power of these theories pertains to assumptions of cultural differentiation. Differential association theory assumes a society to be culturally heterogeneous. It is therefore limited in its ability to explain criminal behavior in culturally homogenous societies because they would lack the differentiation necessary to possess a disparity in definitions favorable or unfavorable to criminal behaviors. In opposition to differential association theory, social control theory assumes society to be culturally homogenous. As a result of these assumptions, the application of differential association theory to explain crime in culturally homogenous or simple undifferentiated societies is inappropriate, whereas the application of social control theory to complex differentiated societies is inappropriate. Social learning theory does not contain differential association theory's assumption of cultural heterogeneity and therefore is not equally limited in its explanatory power. Likewise, general strain theory contains no assumptions pertaining to societal differentiation and is therefore also not limited in its explanatory power in this regard.

*Microlevel Emphasis.* A final theoretical limitation is common to all formalized theories. As all these theories have been formulated to explain individual differences in criminal behavior, they have necessarily failed to explicate the macrolevel dynamics as-

sociated with criminal outcomes. These theories are only concerned with environmental factors insofar as they relate to *explanan* believed to predict criminal behavior. They are thus treated as a property of the individual (e.g., associations or social bonds) and not a property of the environment that theory intends to explain.<sup>3</sup>

In evaluating the explanatory power of the formalized theories pertaining to scope conditions, social learning theory is the least restricted of all the theories. Social learning theory can explain criminal behavior in situations that other theories cannot, and none of the other formalized theories can explain criminal behaviors in situations outside of the scope of social learning theory. General strain theory is second in regards to its limitations in explanatory power because it contains no limitations on the particular society in which it is applicable. General strain theory is narrower in scope than differential association theory in terms of its emphasis on hedonism solely as it relates to the avoidance of unpleasurable things, but it is broader than differential association theory in its acknowledgment that behavioral innovation can occur and its ability to potentially explain one's social networks as an effort to cope with strains. Differential association theory is less limited in its explanatory power than social control theory because of its broader conception of plasticity. Depending on the level of differentiation of the society to which the theory is being applied, differential association theory may be less powerful of an explanation than social control theory in situations where the society has low levels of differentiation. Social control theory only contains more explanatory power than differential association theory when attempting to explain crimes in homogenous societies.

Having discussed limitations of explanatory power in regards to theoretical scope conditions, it is now time to turn to comparisons of the actual explanations of crime in order to evaluate which of the formalized theories has the most powerful *explanan*.

## Explanan and Explanatory Power

The explanatory power of the formalized theories can be compared along two dimensions. The first dimension pertains to whether a theory possesses an *explanans* which is absent from other theories that is crucial to explaining criminal behavior. A second dimension of explanatory power relates to the degree to which a theory possesses an *explanans* that is broader in scope or possibly subsumes predictions made by an *explanans* contained within another theory. Table 6.2 contains a summary of the primary explanan of each of the formalized theories. Since *explanans* within social learning theory potentially subsume *explanans* in all other theories, this section will be organized in terms of social learning theory's *explanan*. At the end of this section, *explanan* that are not contained within social learning theory will be discussed. The primary *explanans* of social learning theory include: (1) differential associations; (2) differential reinforcements (both experienced and vicarious); and (3) definitions.

### *Differential Associations*

Differential association, social learning, and general strain theories all possess an *explanans* related to how criminal behavior may result as a consequence of learning criminal behaviors from others. Differential association theory captures this learning dimension by specifying that individuals learn to engage in criminal behaviors as a result of interacting with the patterns of definitions favorable to criminal behaviors that are exhibited by others. Likewise, as an extension of differential association theory, social learning theory labels these patterns of interactions as differential associations and specifies they are the primary source of one's exposure to differential reinforcements or vicarious reinforcements that facilitate the learning of criminal behavior. General strain theory acknowledges social learning processes may contribute to criminal behavior and additionally specifies that a harsh disciplinary practices can lead to the learning of dispositions

**Table 6.2**  
**Summary of Explanan of Formalized Theories**

<i>Differential Association Theory</i>	<i>Social Learning Theory</i>	<i>Social Control Theory</i>	<i>General Strain Theory</i>
Exposure to values	Differential Associations	Attachments	Dispositions for criminal coping
Possession of a surplus of definitions favorable to criminal behavior compared to definitions unfavorable to it.	Vicarious Learning	Commitments	Ability to legally cope
	Differential Reinforcements	Involvements	Costs of criminal coping
	Possession of Definitions favorable to criminal behavior.	Beliefs	

favorable to criminal behavior. Each of these theories contain an *explanan* of criminal behavior that focuses on learning processes that enable an individual to engage in criminal behaviors. These theories propose that both motivations and one's ability to engage in criminal behavior can be influenced by the learning process. Social control theory, on the other hand, explicitly denies that individuals positively learn to engage in criminal behaviors and therefore is limited in its explanatory power. This limitation stems social control theory's denial that criminal behaviors requires special skills or motives.

*Differential Reinforcements*

In addition to specifying learning sources, social learning theory also specifies a learning process in terms of differential reinforcements and vicarious reinforcements. In addition to facilitating learning, reinforcements can also serve as situational motivators within social learning theory for particular courses of action. Social learning theory is more powerful than differential association theory in this regard due to differential association theory's failure to contain *explanans* that explicate the learning process or situation-

al inducements for criminal behavior. Social learning theory also provides a more powerful explanation of criminal behavior than social control theory because social control theory also fails to specify the learning processes associated with socialization and also does not provide a situational theory of criminal behavior. General strain theory is also a less powerful theory than social learning theory in regards to reinforcements for several reasons. First, general strain theory acknowledges the possibility that vicarious learning can lead to dispositions favorable to criminal behavior and therefore matches social learning theory in terms of its explanatory power relating to behavioral modeling. General strain theory, however, does not specify that individuals can positively learn to engage in criminal behaviors through reinforcements and instead attempts to specify how social learning theory can supplement general strain theory in this regard. This externalization of learning processes reduces general strain theory's explanatory power in terms of learning. Second, general strain theory emphasizes social support and access to resources as increasing a person's ability to legally cope with strains in order to mitigate criminal behavior. Social learning theory would see social support or resources as providing an individual with negative rewards pertaining to a given strain and therefore social learning theory would also predict social support and resources could reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior in certain situations.

As a result of social learning theory's reliance on operant conditioning and vicarious learning principles, it also provides a more powerful explanation of behavioral motivations than all other formalized theories. Differential association theory's reliance on biological drives as the source of all human motivation fails to specify how these drives serve to positively motivate behavior. Because these drives could also be subsumed under social learning theory's concept of nonsocial reinforcers, social learning theory is not only able to account for drives as motivators, but also specifies how drives can serve as nonsocial reinforcers that positively motivate behavior. Social control theory assumes

hedonism is a constant motivator across all individuals, but only states social controls prevent criminal behavior. It is incapable of explaining how situational inducements can positively motivate criminal behavior.

Social learning theory also provides a more powerful explanation of motivation than general strain theory because general strain theory is only able to account for how punishments positively motivate criminal behavior. Social learning theory postulates that both reinforcements and punishments can serve to positively motivate criminal behavior and therefore is of greater explanatory power than general strain theory. Before completely discounting the insights of general strain theory in this regard, it is important to note that Agnew (2006) has correctly observed that social learning theory has tended to focus on how criminal behavior can be seen as rewarding. General strain theory's emphasis on goal blockage, exposure to aversive stimuli, and the loss of something of value as motivators for criminal behavior has provided the valuable insight that criminal behavior can be motivated in terms of negative rewards - that is, the removal of noxious stimuli. Ultimately, it is possible to integrate this insight into social learning theory's current framework because social learning theory already acknowledges punishments and negative rewards as comprising the learning process.

### *Definitions*

Social learning theory also contains a more powerful explanation of criminal behavior than other formalized theories in regard to the role of cognition in explaining criminal behavior. As an elaboration of differential association theory, it subsumes differential association theory's concept of definitions (e.g., attitudes, the direction of motivations, neutralizations) and additionally emphasizes the role of anticipated reinforcements in producing criminal behavior. Additionally, social learning theory's concept of anticipated reinforcements can account for all of social control theory's predictions in

terms of the role attachments, commitments, and beliefs play in deterring criminal behavior. Hirschi ([1969] 2005) specifies that attachment functions as a result of an individual imagining how others would react to a given behavior if they were present. Such a conception of attachment can be subsumed by social learning theory's concept of anticipated reinforcements. Social control theory also specifies that one's commitments, or stakes in conformity, can also dissuade an individual from engaging in criminal behaviors. This can likewise be explained by social learning theory in terms of anticipated reinforcements. Additionally, social control theory's concept of beliefs can be explained by social learning theory's concept of attitudes that account for the moral dimensions of behavior.

Social learning theory also contains several cognitive explanations of criminal behavior that are simply absent from social control theory. Social learning theory contends that neutralizations can exist and free an individual to engage in criminal behavior, while social control theory sees neutralization's solely as *ad hoc* justifications for crimes. Should an individual engage in a criminal behavior as a result of the possession of an *a priori* neutralization, such an act would be beyond the explanatory power of social control theory. Likewise, social control theory denies the possibility that skills can be learned in relation to specific crimes. Any crime that requires complex and crime specific skills (e.g., money laundering) cannot be explained by social control theory because it is only concerned with those things that constrain criminal behavior. Lastly, social control theory ignores the possibility that individuals can learn to engage in criminal behaviors. Social control theory sees beliefs as restraining immoral behavior; however, the theory cannot account for situations where an individual believes he or she *should* engage in a criminal behavior. This includes both the previous discussion of neutralizations and other situations, such as the code of the street (Anderson 1999), in which an individual might possess attitudes that specify crime is appropriate in specific situations.

Social learning theory also provides a more powerful cognitive explanation of criminal behavior than general strain theory. First, general strain theory relies upon social learning theory to explain how individuals can learn to be rewarded by criminal behavior. Second, the cognitions learned within general strain theory relating to the theory's concept of dispositions can be subsumed within social learning theory's concept of attitudes. General strain theory specifies that individuals who possess dispositions favorable to criminal behavior tend to possess the personality traits of negative emotionality and low constraint. Negative emotionality is marked by tendencies to become easily upset, be quick to anger, blame problems on others, be aggressive, and attribute hostile intent to others. Since general strain theory argues these dispositions are learned as a result of the exposure to previous strains (e.g., harsh discipline), then they can be subsumed under social learning theory's concept of attitudes which pertain to orientations towards things. Likewise, general strain theory's concept of low constraint relates to impulsiveness, risk-taking behavior, the rejection social norms, and disregarding the feelings of others. Characteristics of low constraint can also be subsumed by social learning theory's concept of attitudes.

Second, general strain theory specifies that one's ability to legally cope can decrease the likelihood of criminal behavior. General strain theory possesses several *explanans* that are absent from social learning theory in this regard and therefore can provide several explanations of criminal behavior that social learning theory cannot. An individual's intelligence<sup>4</sup>, self-efficacy, and self-esteem all are theorized to reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior in response to strains. Social learning theory possesses no equivalent *explanans*. Other *explanans* within general strain theory are able to be accounted for by social learning theory in regard to one's capacity to legally cope with strains. Problem solving skills and social skills all could be subsumed under social learning theory's con-



**Table 6.3**  
**Summary of Explananda of Formalized Theories**

<i>Differential Association Theory</i>	<i>Social Learning Theory</i>	<i>Social Control Theory</i>	<i>General Strain Theory</i>
Crimes as defined by the legal code.	Deviant behavior  Criminal behavior as a legally proscribed subcategory of deviant behavior.	Absence of delinquency (as defined as being a punishable act by conventional members of society)	Crimes as defined by the legal code (including both juvenile and adult offenses).

cept of attitudes as they reflect particular orientations towards action within specific types of situations or across general types of situations. Additionally, social learning theory avoids the tautological relationships between dispositions, problem solving, and social skills that are present within general strain theory (see Chapter 5) by subsuming the properties of these concepts within the singular general concept of attitudes.

Third, general strain theory specifies that the costs associated with criminal coping decrease the likelihood an individual will engage in criminal behavior in response to experiencing strains. Just as social learning theory was able to subsume predictions derived from social control theory's concept of commitments, general strain theory's *explananda* of costs of criminal coping can be subsumed under social learning theory's concept of anticipated reinforcements. Insofar as an individual possesses things of value they fear to lose should they engage in criminal behavior, the potential loss of these things serve as an anticipated punishment should an individual engage in criminal behavior.

Summarizing the comparisons of explanatory power between formalized theories, social learning theory provides a more powerful explanation of criminal behavior than

the other formalized theories. Social learning theory can account for all explanations of criminal behavior proposed by differential association and social control theories. It can also account for most of the predictions of general strain theory, with the exception of general strain theory's *explanans* relating to self-esteem, self-efficacy, and intelligence. As a result of general strain theory's emphasis on strains, in some ways it could be seen as simply a more precise specification of how punishments potentially lead to criminal outcomes. Such a claim would need to be tentative as social learning theory still cannot account for how self-esteem, self-efficacy, and intelligence relate to crime.

### **Theoretical Explanandum**

Having compared the formalized theories' scope conditions and *explanans*, it is also possible to compare their *explanandum* in order to determine which theories explain a broader class of behavioral outcomes. The variations in *explanandum* between the theories could also be treated as theoretical scope conditions since some conceptions of criminal behavior could be broader or narrower than others. The *explanandum* of these theories can be evaluated in terms of their assumptions pertaining to a legal order and whether they are able to predict the types of crimes one might commit. Table 6.3 contains a summary of the *explanandum* of differential association, social learning, social control, and general strain theories.

### **Legality**

Differential association and general strain theories share a common *explanandum*. Both theories attempt to explain criminal behavior as defined as being behavior that is legally proscribed. While general strain theory also emphasizes that it explains delinquent behavior, such behavior is still legally proscribed even if the proscription is age contingent. Social learning and social control theories both are broader in terms of their

*explanandum* than differential association and general strain theories. Social learning theory attempts to explain both deviant and criminal behavior. It sees criminal behavior as being a special case of deviant behavior. Unlike the other formalized theories that explain legally proscribed behaviors to some degree, social control theory instead attempts to explain delinquent behaviors that are punishable by conventional members of society. Such behaviors need not be proscribed in a legal manner.

As a result of their defined *explanandum*, differential association and general strain theories are limited to explaining criminal behaviors to those societies that possess legal institutions that allow for the formal legal prohibition of particular behaviors. Social learning theory does not explain acts that are criminal, but not deviant, because it sees criminal acts as being a subcategory of deviance by definition. Running a stop sign in a rural area, for example, may not be considered deviant among the locals, even though it is legally proscribed. While social learning theory could explain such an act in terms of rewards or punishments, its definition of criminal acts as being necessarily deviant can create an awkward logical inconsistency with its *explanandum* in certain situations.

Social control theory contains no assumptions pertaining to the legal organization of a society in its *explanandum*. Hirschi ([1969] 2005) states that social control theory explains delinquent behavior and that delinquent behavior is defined as being behavior that is punishable by members of conventional society. As a result of this definition, social control theory would not be limited to explaining criminal behavior to those societies that are capable of legally prescribing acts. In this way, both social control and social learning theories are not limited by their *explanandum* to explaining criminal behavior in modern societies with formal legal systems.

## **Types of Crime**

Differential association, social learning, and general strain theories are all capable

of explaining the type of crime an individual might commit. Differential association theory explains specific types of crimes as being a function of the definitions of the situation one learns regarding a specific act as a result of the values to which one is exposed. Likewise, social learning theory can predict specific acts based upon the degree to which a behavior has been directly reinforced or vicariously learned. General strain theory also can predict specific types of criminal behaviors as a function of the type of negative affect one is experiencing, one's dispositions favorable to criminal coping, ability to legally cope, and costs of criminal coping associated with the behavior.

Social control theory is unable to explain specific types of criminal behavior because of the theory's assertion that motivation is constant across all actors. Since social control theory is really explaining the *absence* of criminal behavior, it not interested in why an individual engages in a criminal act. Social control theory only explains criminal behavior as the inverse of the absence of criminal behavior, and therefore cannot explain specific behavioral outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

In summarizing this discussion of explanatory power of the formalized theories, several conclusions can be drawn. First, among those theories formalized, social learning theory provides the most powerful explanation of criminal behavior at the microlevel. Its explanatory power is among the least restricted of all of the formalized theories in terms of theoretical scope conditions. Its *explanan* are capable of subsuming the predictions of the *explanan* of all of the theories with the exception general strain theory's *explanan* relating to intelligence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Additionally, social learning theory's explanandum of deviance and criminal behavior do not limit the theory to explaining criminal or deviant behavior to societies that contain formalized laws. Social control

theory is distinct from other theories in that its *explanandum* is the absence of criminal behavior. As a result of this distinction, the superior explanatory power of other theories maybe limited to those theoretical tests that attempt to explain the number or types of criminal behaviors. If an empirical assessment of these theories were to attempt compare these theories when explaining the absence of criminal behavior, the limited scope of the *explanandum* may neutralize the added explanatory power of *explanans* within differential association, social learning, and general strain theories that are intended to help explain the direction of criminal behavior.

Criminologists have long used statistical measures of model fit as a means of empirically assessing the explanatory power of criminological theories (e.g., Elliot et al. 1979). Such a view is rather limited because empirical tests are but one way to evaluate the explanatory power of a scientific theory (see Gibbs 1972). Comparisons of theoretical components related to scope conditions and the explanatory power of *explanans* can also be utilized to evaluate the explanatory power of a given theory (Cohen 1989). Akers (2009) has pointed out that social learning theory typically yields the highest levels of model fit of any criminological theories when attempting to explain criminal behavior. While measurement error or methodological issues could potentially explain the lower model fits of the empirical tests of other theories, it is likely that social learning theory yields stronger empirical support because its *explanans* can subsume the *explanans* of other criminological theories and other theories have less explanatory power because they cannot account for all of the predictions of social learning theory. As an elaboration of differential association theory, social learning theory has more explanatory power than differential association theory. Social control theory simply cannot account for individuals learning to engage in criminal behaviors or criminal motivation. Likewise, general strain theory only emphasizes strains (or punishments within social learning theory) and is also limited in its ability to explain how criminal behavior can be learned through negative rewards. As

a result of social learning theory's ability to almost completely subsume the explanans of the other formalized theories, it currently provides the most powerful explanation of criminal behavior.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Within social learning theory, the criminal behaviors of those with learning deficits could potentially be explained in terms of situational reinforcements. Despite this potential, social learning theory's failure to specify a situational theory of criminal behavior through its use of the matching function and its reliance on previous learning history results in the theory's overall inability to explain how situational reinforcements, in the absence of a previous learning history, might result in criminal behavior. As result of the theory's reliance on learning histories to predict criminal behavior, the criminal behaviors of individuals possessing learning deficits remain beyond the scope of the theory.

<sup>2</sup> General strain theory does state that individuals can develop dispositions for criminal coping as a result of exposure to behavior models; however, the theory fails to articulate what is involved in behavioral modeling.

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of social control theory, although the formalize theories have included some discussion of how macrolevel phenomenon corresponds to individual criminal outcomes. Sutherland (1947) specified that modernization processes created differentiation as result of cultural conflict and anomic forces. The dynamics of this process or not clearly articulated as ultimately it was one's actual associations and not the demographic composition of the community that was theorized to predict criminal behavior. Social learning theory has recently been articulated to discuss how distributions of reinforcements within the environment relate to criminal behavior (Akers 2009). Likewise, general strain theory has been elaborated to discuss how social structural location be exposed individuals differentially to strains (Agnew 19xx). Despite these elaborations of the linkages between macro and micro levels, these theories remain focused on individual level explanations of criminal behavior and are only concerned with macrolevel forces insofar as they relate to individual differences in criminal behavior. The precise macrolevel dynamics that can affect the macrolevel forces theorized to influence microlevel correlates of criminal behavior are not explicated.

<sup>4</sup> Social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) also includes the concept of intelligence. Within social control theory, intelligence increases the likelihood an individual will achieve academic success and therefore can potentially influence an individual's level of commitment.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

At the heart of the integration/elaboration debate (see Messner, Krohn, and Liska 1989) was the issue of whether theory development in criminology was to proceed through theoretical integration, conceptual integration, or elaboration. Within criminology, integration was seen as emerging in the form of end-to-end, side-by-side, and up-and-down integrations (Hirschi 1979). End-to-end integrations sought to link *explananda* from one theory to the *explanans* of another theory in order to demonstrate how the theories were complementary (e.g., Elliot et al. 1979, Elliot et al. 1985). These integrations were often organized with theories that provide more remote explanations of criminal behavior linking to theories that provide more proximate explanations (Messner, Krohn, and Liska 1979). In Chapter 5, general strain theory similarly tried to elaborate how processes within general strain theory related to processes within social control and social learning theories (ibid). Side-by-side integrations were not really integrations at all and specified that certain crimes were explained better by certain criminological theories (ibid.). Under this view, certain theories are better at predicting crime under certain situations. Up-and-down integrations attempted to abstract elements from multiple theories in order to arrive at a newly formed theory (Hirschi 1979), or attempt to subsume the predictions of a second theory within the predictions of a more general theory.

Theoretical elaboration represents a second means of theory development that involves adding knowledge claims to an existing theory rather than attempting to integrate existing theories. Elaborations can be the result of the interplay between theory construction and research, the imagination of the theorist, or borrowing knowledge claims or insights from other theories that are logically incorporated into an existing theory (Thornberry 1989).

Regardless of the theoretical development strategy, it is difficult to integrate or elaborate existing theories if these theories are not clearly articulated. This dissertation has utilized theoretical formalization as a means of more clearly stating microlevel theories in the hopes that clearly articulating the four formalized theories will allow for a better evaluation of how these theories can be further developed to foster cumulative theory development within criminology. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to attempt to integrate these theories, but each of the theories will be discussed in terms of how they may be integrated or elaborated in order to foster further theory development.

### **End-to-End Integration**

Despite arguments for theoretical integration employing an end-to-end technique (e.g., Eliot et al. 1979; Elliot et al. 1985), general strain theory serves as a dire warning against such efforts. As discussed in Chapter 5, general strain theory's effort to integrate with social control and social learning theories resulted in numerous tautologies that undermined the logical integrity of the theory. Unlike previous criticisms of this mode of integration that held disparate theoretical assumptions among integrated theories leads to logical inconsistencies (Hirschi 1979, 1989), this integrative effort was logically inconsistent as a result of theoretically overlapping concepts.

Akers (1989) discusses the potential of conceptual overlap between competing theories and observes that most criminological theories contain concepts that are similar to concepts in other theories. Akers advocates that this overlap can serve as a basis for conceptual integration as concepts subsume similar concepts, or are abstracted to form a new broader concept. In the case of general strain theory, no such conceptual integration was attempted. As result, tautologies were generated within the theory once it was integrated with social control and social learning theories.



Another problem that has not been discussed in regard to end-to-end integrations is that theories contain different *explananda*. The integration/elaboration debate assumed each theory was explaining criminal behavior or deviance, but this was not the case. Differential association theory was solely attempting to explain criminal behavior as defined by the legal code. Social learning theory was attempting to explain criminal and deviant behavior. Social control theory was only attempting to explain why individuals *do not* commit delinquent acts, and delinquent acts were acts that was punishable by a conventional members of society. Lastly, general strain theory only attempted to explain those criminal behaviors, as legally defined, that were positively motivated by strains. These different *explananda* reveal that both differential association and general strain theories are more limited in their *explananda* than social learning theory, and social control theory is trying to explain something different all together. Since social control theory holds motivation constant, it is only capable of explaining the *absence* of delinquent behavior and not its form should it occur. The absence of criminal behavior is dichotomous: either someone *did not* commit a crime or they *did* commit a crime. While Elliot (1985) has noted the assumption of constant motivation within social control theory is unnecessary and could be dropped by integrationists, this assumption is actually crucial to the theory's *explanandum* of why individuals do not engage in criminal behavior. Stated another way: Since social control theory does not explain motivation, motivation serves as a scope condition that is necessary to hold constant in order to predict that the presence of social bonds leads to the absence of criminal behavior. Thus, another problem integrating criminological theories is that many theories differ in their *explananda*.

The logical problems encountered by general strain theory's integration with social control and social learning theories is somewhat different than the logical problems of integration in Elliot's work with his colleagues (Elliot et al. 1979; Elliot et al. 1985). Whereas Elliot's efforts linked concepts within theories together explicitly, Agnew (2006)

instead linked concepts within general strain theory to entire theories. This outsourcing of explanation had the unintended consequence of producing tautologies within the theory.

As a result of the formalization of general strain theory, and in addition to prior critiques of this method, end-to-end approaches can be identified to be problematic insofar as: (1) theories contain different underlying assumptions (Hirschi 1979, 1989); (2) theoretical concepts overlap and result in tautological relationships with the integrated theory; and (3) theories contain different *explananda*.

### **Side-by-Side Integrations**

Side-by-side integrations are not really integration at all and instead are merely statements that some theories are better at explaining specific types of crimes depending upon a theory's scope conditions (Messner, Krohn, and Liska 1979). This formalization effort has identified several instances in which a specific criminological theory may be better at explaining criminal behavior than another theory.

First, social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) is not capable of explaining why an individual engages in a specific crime. Its assumption of human nature that motivation is constant across all actors produces within the theory a scope condition that limits its ability to predict specific types of crimes.

Second, a society's level of differentiation can dictate which theory is better at explaining the occurrence of criminal behavior. Differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) is limited to explaining criminal behavior in those differentiated societies where value-consensus is not present. In such societies, it is possible to have rival definitions of the situation to the conventional order that can favor criminal outcomes. Social control theory (Hirsch [1969] 2005) is limited to explaining crime in those societies that are undifferentiated and culturally homogenous. Since the theory assumes value-consensus is present, and motivation is constant, one's bond to society is the sole force influenc-

ing criminal behavior and the absence of bonds leads to the occurrence of crime. Social learning and general strain theories are not limited in this regard.

Third, not all theories are identical in their *explananda* and therefore in some situations are explaining different things. Social learning theory (Akers 2009) is concerned with explaining deviance and criminal behavior as a subset of deviance. General strain theory (Agnew 2006) is only concerned with explaining those crimes that are the result of positive motivations that have resulted from the negative emotional states one experiences when exposed to strains. Social control theory (Hirschi [1969] 2005) is attempting to explain the absence of punishable behavior. Lastly, differential association theory (Sutherland 1947) is primarily concerned with violations of the criminal code. While overlap is present within these theories' *explananda*, enough differences can be observed where one could expect a particular theory, such as general strain theory, to better explain than other theories when explaining a spontaneous crime that results from anger.

As a result of these differences within theories, each theory has a unique set of *explanans* that attempt to explain their unique *explananda*. As such, it is reasonable to assume certain theories are better at explaining certain phenomena insofar as those phenomena are consistent with a theory's scope conditions and defined *explanandum*.

### **Up-and-Down Integration**

As discussed in the previous chapter, social learning theory (Akers 2009) can potentially subsume the *explanans* that are present in all of the formalized theories. This coincides with previous observations (see Akers 1989) that there is a great deal of conceptual overlap present among criminological theories, particularly between social learning and social control theories. This conceptual overlap suggests that it is possible to integrate theories using an up-and-down approach that subsumes the concept of one theory within a more abstract concept in another theory (ibid.). But as Thornberry (1989) cogently points

out, such integration does not address the propositional relationships within a theory. Even if two concepts, such as definitions and beliefs, are demonstrated to overlap, the utilization of the concepts differs depending upon the theory. In comparing social control theory to differential association theory, for example, Hirschi ([1969] 2005) observes:

“...if the ‘definitions favorable to law violation’ upon which the theory [differential association] rests are taken as definitions that *free* the actor to commit delinquent acts, the theory is falsifiable (and the distinction between differential association theory and social control theory is easily lost)” (15).

In arriving at this statement, Hirschi cites Sykes and Matza (1957) and Burgess and Akers (1966) who elaborate differential association theory to more clearly articulate that individuals do learn neutralizations that *free* an individuals to engage in criminal behavior. Even if such a statement were to be interpreted as indicating that differential association theory could make similar predictions to social control theory, and subsume social control theory’s concept of belief, what benefit is it to differential association theory to do so? It already has a concept of definitions capable of making the same prediction, and adding the concept of beliefs can introduce the problem of whether motivations need to be held constant for the concept of belief to predict criminal behavior.

Subsuming one concept is just one way to arrange at an up-and-down integration, it is also possible to decompose key elements from overlapping concepts present within numerous theories and develop a new theory from the ashes; however, this strategy has not been employed in criminology.

## **Elaboration**

Theoretical elaboration represents another mode of theory development. Under elaboration, existing theories are further developed by: (1) examining sources of variation within a theory’s *explanans*; (2) attempting to indentify intervening phenomena between

an *explanans* and *explanandum*; and (3) examining the possibility of feedback loops within the theory (Thornberry 1989). The benefit of elaboration is it allows for theory development that does not encounter the logical problems inherent to theory integration efforts.

This formalization effort has clarified some of these potential sources of elaboration for all of the formalized theories, as each scope condition that has been identified potentially serves as a source of elaboration within each theory. These will be discussed in more detail for each of the formalized theories.

#### *Differential Association Theory/Social Learning Theory*

As differential association and social learning theories share a common framework, their potential for elaboration will be discussed together. Both theories contain scope conditions that limit their explanatory power at the microlevel. For differential association theory, it is unable to account for behavioral innovation. For social learning theory, it is unable to account for learning that occurs when individuals rely on inductive techniques when engaging in behaviors for which they have no reinforcement histories. Both of these problems are tied to the question of how do individuals act in novel situations. In order to answer this question, the cognitive concepts within these theories would need to be further elaborated in order to account for the mental operations that inductive processes inevitably entail. Cognitions relating to attitudes, motives, neutralizations, and skills within these theories are insufficient for this task, and prior to tackling the problem of induction, these theories would need to better conceptualize the cognitive components of the theories. Developments in cognitive psychology pertaining to *schemata* (Gerrig 1988), scripts (Abelson 1976), and working models (Bowlby 1982) could be applied to differential association and social learning theories in order to further elaborate these theories' conception of definitions. Once this elaboration occurs, the subject of induction

could be explored as *schemata*, scripts, and working models all allow individuals to make inferences within situations. One step in this direction has been the work of Proctor, Williams, and Guerra (2009) to specify a situational elaboration of differential association and social learning theories that draws upon social information processing theory (Crick and Dodge 1994; Dodge et al. 1986) and the previously noted cognitive concepts in order to provide a situational explanation of criminal behavior.

A second area of elaboration for these theories could be to articulate the macrolevel forces affecting the learning process. Since differential association theory is no longer actively developed as a stand-alone theory, there is little chance such a development will occur. Such an elaboration could attempt to explore whether differential association theory might be able to explain criminal behavior in cultural homogenous societies. Social learning theory has already moved towards being elaborated in a macrolevel direction, as Akers (2009) has developed social-structure-social learning theory that sees learning as the primary process linking the microlevel and macrolevel of society. It proposes that variations in social location expose individuals to differences in associations, reinforcements, behavioral models, and definitions.

Other areas for elaboration pertain to social learning theory's failure to specify how punishments can positively motivate criminal behavior, and possible feedback relationships within the theory. The possibility that punishments can motivate criminal behavior has been a major insight by general strain theory, and it has been previously discussed that social learning theory already contains the concepts necessary for such an explanation; however, the theory has not emphasized this possibility and could be improved should it do so. Additionally, it is possible to elaborate social learning theory in terms of feedback relationships. Akers (2009) has noted that such relationships are present, and

the formalization of social learning theory in Chapter 3 has attempted to further clarify these relationships.

### *Social Control Theory*

Social control theory could also be elaborated. It is unlikely the theory could discard its assumption that human motivation is constant, or that society is marked by value-consensus. These assumptions are too deeply rooted with the theory to be discarded. It could, however, change its *explanandum* from being the absence of criminal behavior to being actual criminal behavior. In doing so, it could potentially attempt to explain specific crimes as being caused by variations in social control for specific activities. This would allow the theory to preserve its value-consensus assumption, as well as its assumption that human nature is constant. While social control theory maintains that parents do not share their criminal behaviors with their children, it would be logical consistent within the theory to say variations may exist in the degree to which social controls are present for specific behaviors. Variations in specific criminal behaviors could be explained in terms of variations in social control, and not motivation, and therefore the logical consistency of the theory could be preserved.

Feedback relationships have also been elaborated within social control theory as a result of the formalization presented in Chapter 4. Within social control theory, commitments to conventional society lead individuals to become involved in conventional activities, which in turn strengthen one's commitments to society.

### *General Strain Theory*

Identifying potential paths of elaboration is far more difficult for general strain theory because of the problems in logical consistency it faces. Prior to exploring sources of variation within its *explanans*, attempting to identify intervening concepts between

its *explanans* and *explanandum*, or identifying potential feedback loops, it is crucial that concepts within the theory be more clearly defined and purged of tautological problems. It was beyond this formalization to resolve such problems; however, the identification of the definitional problems itself can potentially improve the prospects of theoretical development for general strain theory.

It is clear that there is also one fundamental limitation when elaborating general strain theory. Since the theory focuses solely on how strains can generate negative affective states that result in criminal behavior, the theory seems limited in its capacity to explain other types of crimes and will always have less explanatory power than the other formalized theories in this regard.

Like all microlevel theories, general strain theory can be elaborated to specify the macrolevel forces that influence the strains one experiences. Agnew (1999, 2006) has theorized about how one's structural location might affect the strains to which he or she is exposed.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation proposed formalization as another mode of theory development within criminology. Formalization itself is not an end, but rather it serves to produce more clearly defined theoretical statements that foster a greater ability to integrate and elaborate theories, as well as provide clearer statements from which one can derive better empirical tests of theories. By identifying scope conditions, articulating conceptual definitions, and specifying theoretical knowledge claims it has been the intent of this dissertation to demonstrate the possible benefits of formalization for cumulative theory development.

Formalization also allowed for a more straightforward comparison between theories in terms of theoretical scope conditions, *explanans*, and *explananda*. In doing



so, areas of overlap and difference between theories could be identified. All theories were demonstrated to hold that human behavior is fundamentally hedonistic, while social control and general strain theories were more limited in their conceptions of plasticity. All theories also saw learning as an important element of predicting criminal behavior, though social learning theory was the only theory to articulate a learning process. Theories also differed in several ways relating to their assumption of cultural differentiation or the degree to which they saw individuals as pragmatic innovators.

The identification and clarification of scope conditions also potentially provides an answer as to why theoretical competition has primarily failed within criminology. Elliot (1985) observed:

“Classical theories of crime and delinquency rarely provided competing hypotheses that were testable, theories with very different assumptions and causal propositions frequently predicted similar outcomes, and in those instances where such tests were possible the results were seldom definitive” (125).

The problem with theory competition is that if scope conditions are not being taken into account, the theories cannot compete on a level playing field. Scope conditions imply that propositions are *conditional* and only hold, or are more likely to hold, when scope conditions are met (see Cohen 1989). Should theoretical competitions fail to incorporate scope conditions into empirical assessments of a theory, ambiguous findings may result from the failure to account methodologically for scope conditions rather than be due to the actual shortcomings of a theory's predictions. This formalization effort potentially opens up the possibility of theoretical competitions that are informed by scope conditions. Such competitions could give criminologists a better reading of the explanatory power of criminological theories.

Prior to concluding this dissertation, it is important to note that the formalizations presented have not been intended to provide definitive statements of the formalized theo-

ries. The intent was simply to demonstrate the possible benefits of theory formalization for cumulative theory development. One benefit of formalization is that it can objectify a particular theory and serve as a basis of inter-subjective agreement as to a theory's predictions and limitations. Once a theory is formalized, individuals can contest scope conditions, propositions, or definitions in order to arrive at a more agreed upon statement of the theory. And once these conceptual components have been isolated and identified, they can come into focus for future theory development. As such, this dissertation should be seen as a starting point advocating theory formalization and not as an effort to utilize formalization as a means to declare the statements of the theories presented here as definitive.

## References

- Abelson, Robert P. 1976. "Script Processing in Attitude Formation and Decision Making." Pp. 33-45 in *Cognitive and Social Behavior* edited by J. S. Carroll and J. W. Payne. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.
- Adams, Reed. 1973. "Differential Association and Learning Principles Revisited." *Social Problems* 20: 458-470.
- Agnew, Robert. 1992. "Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency." *Criminology* 30: 47-87.
- . 1999. "A General Strain Theory of Community Differences in Crime Rates." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 36: 123-155.
- . 2006. *Pressured Into Crime*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company.
- Agnew, Robert, Timothy Brezina, John Paul Wright, and Francis Cullen. 2002. "Strain, Personality Traits, and Delinquency: Extending General Strain Theory." *Criminology* 40: 43-72.
- Akers, Ronald L. 1968. "Problems in the Sociology of Deviance: Social Definitions and Behavior." *Social Forces* 46: 455-465.
- . 1985. *Deviant Behavior: A Social Learning Approach*. Belmont, CA: Wadworth Publishing Company.
- . 1989. "A Social Behaviorist's Perspective on Integration of Theories of Crime and Deviance." Pp. 23-36 in *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime*, edited by S. F. Messner, M. D. Krohn, and A. E. Liska. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- . 1996. "Is Differential Association/Social Learning Cultural Deviance Theory?" *Criminology* 34: 229-247.

- . 2009. *Social Learning and Social Structure: A general Theory of Crime and Deviance*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Bandura, Albert. 1977. *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Becker, Howard S. . 1963. *The Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press.
- Bernard, Thomas J. 1989. "A Theoretical Approach to Integration." Pp. 137-159 in *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime*, edited by S. F. Messner, M. D. Krohn, and A. Liska. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- . 2001. "Integrating Theories in Criminology." Pp. 335-346 in *Explaining Criminals and Crime*, edited by R. Paternoster and R. Bachman. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing.
- Bernard, Thomas J. and Jeffrey B. Snipes. 1996. "Theoretical Integration in Criminology." *Crime and Justice* 20: 301-348.
- Bonger, Willem. 1969. *Criminality and Economic Conditions*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana university Press.
- Bowlby, John. 1982. *Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Burgess, Robert and Ronald L. Akers. 1966. "A Differential Association-Reinforcement Theory of Criminal Behavior." *Social Problems* 14: 128-147.
- Cloward, Richard A. and Lloyd Olin. 1960. *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs*. New York: Free Press.
- Cohen, Albert K. 1955. *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*. New York: Free Press.
- Cohen, Bernard P. 1989. *Developing Sociological Knowledge*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

- Cohen, Lawrence E. and Marcus Felson. 1979. "Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activities Approach." *American Sociological Review* 44: 588-608.
- Cressey, Donald. 1951. "Criminological Research and the Definition of Crime." *American Journal of Sociology* 56: 546-551.
- Cressey, Donald R. 1950. "The Criminal Violation of Trust." *American Sociological Review* 15: 738-743.
- . 1952. "Application and Verification of the Differential Association Theory." *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 43: 43-52.
- . 1960b. "Epidemiology and Individual Conduct: A Case from Criminology." *Pacific Sociological Review* 3: 47-58.
- Crick, Nikki R. and Kenneth A. Dodge. 1994. "A Review and a Reformulation of Social Information-Processing Mechanisms in Children's Social Adjustment." *Psychological Bulletin* 115: 74-101
- DeFleur, Melvin L. and Richard Quinney. 1966. "A Reformulation of Sutherland's Differential Association Theory and a Strategy for Empirical Verification." *Journal Research in Crime and Delinquency* 3: 1-22.
- Dodge, Kenneth A., Gregory S. Pettit, Cynthia L. McClaskey, Melissa M. Brown, and John M. Gottman. 1986. "Social Competence in Children." *Mongraphs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 51:i-vi+1-85.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1956. *Education and Sociology*. Translated by S. D. Fox. New York: Free Press.
- . [1933] 1984. *The Division of Labour in Society*. Translated by W. D. Halls. New York: The Free Press.
- Elliot, Delbert S. 1985. "The Assumption that Theories Can Be Combined with Increased Explanatory: Theoretical Integrations." Pp. 123-149 in *Theoretical Methods in Criminology*, edited by R. F. Meier. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

- Elliot, Delbert S., Suzanne S. Ageton, and Rachelle J. Canter. 1979. "An Integrated Perspective on Delinquent Behavior." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 16: 3-27.
- Elliot, Delbert S., David Huizinga, and Suzanne S. Ageton. 1985. *Explaining Delinquency and Drug Use*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Fararo, Thomas J. 1989. *The Meaning of General Theoretical Sociology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Freese, Lee. 1980. "Theoretical Methods in Sociology: Seven Essays." edited by L. Freese. Pittsburg, PA: Pittsburg University Press.
- Gaylord, Mark S. and John F. Galliher. 1990. *The Criminology of Edwin Sutherland*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Gerrig, Richard J. 1988. "Text Comprehension." in *The Psychology of Human Thought*, edited by R. J. Sternberg and E. E. Smith. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, Jack. 1972. *Sociological Theory Construction*. Hindsdale, IL: Dryden Press.
- Gibbs, Jack P. 1965. "Norms: The Problem of Definition and Classification." *American Journal of Sociology* 70: 586-594.
- . 1985. "The Methodology of Theory Construction in Criminology." Pp. 23-50 in *Theoretical Methods in Criminology*, edited by R. F. Meier. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publication.
- . 1989. "Three Perennial Issues in the Sociology of Deviance." Pp. 179-195 in *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime*, edited by S. F. Messner, M. D. Krohn, and A. Liska. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Glaser, Daniel. 1960. "Differential Association Theory and Criminological Prediction." *Social Problems* 8: 6-14.

- Gottfredson, Michael R. and Travis Hirschi. [1990] 2004. *A General Theory of Crime*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Greenberg, David. 1977. "Delinquency and the Age Structure of Society." *Contemporary Crisis* 1: 189-223.
- Hage, Jerald. 1994. "Introduction." Pp. 1-14 in *Formal Theory in Sociology: Opportunity or Pitfall*, edited by J. Hage. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Halbasch, Keith. 1979. "Differential Reinforcement Theory Examined." *Criminology* 17: 217-229.
- Hirschi, Travis. 1979. "Separate and Unequal Is Better." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 16: 34-38.
- . 1989. "Exploring Alternatives to Integrated Theory." Pp. 37-49 in *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime*, edited by S. F. Messner, M. D. Krohn, and A. Liska. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- . [1969] 2005. *Causes of Delinquency*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Holyoak, Keith J. and Richard E. Nisbett. 1988. "Induction." Pp. 50-91 in *The Psychology of Human Thought*, edited by R. J. Sternberg and E. E. Smith. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jeffery, C. R. 1966. "Criminal Behavior and Learning Theory." *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 56: 294-300.
- Jeffery, C. Ray. 1980. "Learning Theory and Modern Psychobiology." *Criminology* 18: 130-134.
- Jeffery, Clarence Ray. 1959. "An Integrated Theory of Crime and Criminal Behavior." *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 49: 533-552.

- Kornhauser, Ruth Rosner. 1978. *Social Sources of Delinquency : An Appraisal of Analytic Models*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Liska, Allen E., Marvin D. Krohn, and Steven F. Messner. 1989. "Strategies and Requisites for Theoretical Integration in the Study of Crime and Deviance." Pp. 1-19 in *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime*, edited by S. F. Messner, M. D. Krohn, and A. E. Liska. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Matsueda, Ross L. 1988. "The Current State of Differential Association Theory." *Crime & Delinquency* 34:277.
- Meier, Robert F. 1985a. "An Introduction to Theoretical Methods in Criminology." Pp. 11-19 in *Theoretical Methods in Criminology*, edited by R. F. Meier. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publication.
- . 1985b. "Theoretical Methods in Criminology." Pp. 247. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Merton, Robert K. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Messerschmidt, James. 1993. *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of a Theory*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Messner, Steven F., Marvin D. Krohn, and Allen E. Liska. 1989. "Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime." Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Proctor, Kristopher, Kirk R. Williams, and Nancy G. Guerra. 2009. "Cognition and Crime: An Integration of Differential Association Theory and an Ecological Social Cognitive Model." Presented at the *Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology*. Philadelphia, PA.
- Quinney, Richard. 1965. "Is Criminal Behaviour Deviant Behaviour?" *British Journal of Criminology* 5: 132-142.



- Schuessler, Karl. 1973. "Introduction." Pp. xi-xxxvi in *On Analyzing Crime*, edited by K. Schuessler. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Sellin, Johan Thorsten. 1938. "Culture Conflict and Crime." Social Science Research Counsel, New York.
- Short, James F. Jr. 1960. "Differential Association as a Hypothesis: Problems of Empirical Testing." *Social Problems* 8: 14-25.
- Short, James F., Jr. 1979. "On the Etiology of Delinquent behavior." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 16: 28-33.
- . 1985. "The Levels of Explanation Problem." Pp. 51-72 in *Theoretical Methods in Criminology*, edited by R. F. Meier. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publication.
- . 1989. "Exploring Integration of Theoretical Levels of Explanation: Notes on Gange Delinquency." Pp. 262-278 in *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime*, edited by S. F. Messner, M. D. Krohn, and A. Liska. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sutherland, Edwin H. 1940. "White-Collar Criminality." *American Sociological Review* 5:1-12.
- . 1947. *Principles of Criminology*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company.
- . 1983. *White Collar Crime: The Uncut Version*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- . [1929] 1956. "Crime and the Conflict Process." Pp. 99-111 in *The Sutherland Papers*, edited by A. Cohen, A. Lindsmith, and K. Schuessler. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- . [1932] 1956a. "The Michael-Adler Report." Pp. 229-246 in *The Sutherland Papers*, edited by A. Cohen, A. Lindsmith, and K. Schuessler. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

- . [1932] 1956b. "Social Process in Behaviors Problems." Pp. 112-119 in *The Sutherland Papers*, edited by A. Cohen, A. Lindsmith, and K. Schuessler. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- . [1936] 1956. "Juvenile Delinquency and Community Organization." Pp. 141-146 in *The Sutherland Papers*, edited by A. Cohen, A. Lindsmith, and K. Schuessler. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- . [1942] 1956. "Development of the Theory." Pp. 13-29 in *The Sutherland Papers*, edited by A. Cohen, A. Lindsmith, and K. Schuessler. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Sykes, Gresham M. and David Matza. 1957. "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency." *American Sociological Review* 22: 664-670.
- Thomas, W.I. 1966. *On Social Organization and Personality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- . [1923] 1967. *The Unadjusted Girl*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Thomas, William Isaac and Florian Znaniecki. [1927] 1966a. "Social Personality: Organization of Attitudes." Pp. 11-36 in *On Social Organization and Social Personality*, edited by M. Janowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . [1927] 1966b. "Methodological Note: Attitude and Value." Pp. 257-288 in *On Social Organization and Social Personality*, edited by M. Janowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thornberry, Terence P. 1989. "Reflections on the Advantages and Disadvantages of Theoretical Integration." Pp. 51-60 in *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime*, edited by S. F. Messner, M. D. Krohn, and A. Liska. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Turk, Austin T. 1964. "Prospects for Theories of Criminal Behavior." *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 55: 454-461.

- . 1969. *Criminality and Legal Order*. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company.
- . 2001. "Conflict Theory." in *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Deviant Behavior*, edited by C. D. Bryant. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Turner, Jonathan. 1994. "The Failure of Sociology to Institutionalize Cumulative Theorizing." Pp. 41-51 in *Formal Theory in Sociology: Opportunity or Pitfall*, edited by J. Hage. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Turner, Jonathan H. 1991. *The Structure of Sociological Theory*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Vold, George B. 1951. "Edwin Hardin Sutherland: Sociologist Criminologist." *American Sociological Review* 16: 2-9.
- Vold, George B., Thomas J. Bernard, and Jeffrey B. Snipes. 1998. *Theoretical Criminology*. New York: Oxford University Press.