

A Comprehensive Analysis of Social Learning Theory Linked to Criminal and Deviant Behavior

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Abstract

The chief concern in any community dealing with crime is not the criminal punishment but preventing young people from being educated in a culture and life of crime. Another concern is the increased involvement of juveniles in crime as victims and perpetrators, while there can be a combination of risk factors contributing to juvenile delinquency. Social Learning Theory (SLT) exhibits one comprehensive explanation in describing those contributing factors. Akers (1998) redefines social learning theory to include social structure; both theories are intertwined similarly to DNA. Each element is interdependent on the other and has a significant impact on a child's developmental process. Social Learning consists of sociology, psychology, and criminology, while social structure leans toward an individual's environment. In addition to social learning and social structure, biological factors are critical in assessing the propensity of juvenile delinquency. This integrated model approach assures that evidence-based practice programs are specifically tailored to each individual. The susceptibility of the biological factors contributes or is enhanced by environmental cues; there is no direct determinant of delinquency or deviant behavior strictly based on biology. Integrating the abovementioned theoretical perspectives assist in ensuring prevention programs are modified to decrease juvenile recidivism and reduce the likelihood of juveniles becoming carrier criminality.

Introduction

Social Learning Theory (SLT) maintains Sutherland's (1947) original assertions that the learning of criminal behavior involves the learning of techniques to commit crimes, the learning of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes (Akers, 2011). Although Albert Bandura is known for theorizing SLT, this theory is an off-shoot from Sutherland's (1947) differential association. Bandura is quite different from other learning theorists who look at learning as a direct result of conditioning, reinforcement, and punishment. Albert Bandura explains that copy behavior from each other through observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory has often been called a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation. It is noteworthy that LST in human behavior is generally associated with Albert Bandura's work and his research on modeling and imitation (Bethards,2014). Bandura postulated that behavior could be learned at the cognitive level through observing other people's actions. Bandura believed that people could imagine themselves in similar situations and incurring similar outcomes. Once the behavior is learned, it may be reinforced or punished by the consequences it generates (Akers, 2011; Bossan, Jann, & Hammerstein, 2015).

On the other hand, Sutherland (1947) focused on nine elements in explaining criminal or deviant behavior: “1) Criminal behavior is learned, 2) Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication, 3) The principal component in the process of learning of criminal or deviant behavior occurs within intimate personal groups, 4) When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple, and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes, 5) The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable, 6) A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of 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 other learning, 9) Although criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values, because non-criminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values” (p. 79).

Based on the above elements, Sutherland’s first position states that criminal behavior is learned, the sixth element is critical in understanding differential association which suggest that an individual commits deviant or criminal acts based on what he/she has learned, this principal of differential associations posed that the individual has acquired a certain definition (justification) which are favorable to law violations. Though Sutherland did not give specifics on the actual learning processes, the implications of the seventh element which Cressey (1960) called modalities of association, can give some explanation on how criminal behavior is learned. How often an individual is exposed (frequency), the amount of time (duration), if the individual is exposed first (priority), and the amount of intensity or importance toward deviant behavior (Bossan et al., 2015; Hanna, Crittenden, & Crittenden, 2013).

The critical component to differential association was based on the content of learning, but not the actual learning process. Burgess and Akers (1966b) specified the actual learning mechanism in their differential association-reinforcement theory, which redefine Sutherland’s previous theory, yet retain differential association element and incorporated the learning principals of respondent and operant conditioning research conducted by B.F. Skinner. Burgess and Akers (1966b) incorporated behavioral learning theory terms and concept into the learning mechanism as follow:

1. Differential reinforcement
2. Classical or “respondent” conditioning
3. Discriminative stimuli
4. Schedules of reinforcement
5. Symbolic interactionism

Burgess and Akers (1966b) concepts states that differential reinforcement are voluntary actions conditioned by punishment or rewards; classical or “respondent” are based on involuntary behavior; discriminative stimuli deal with environmental cues; schedules of reinforcement are the ratio and rates in which a punishment or reward follows the behavior; and symbolic interactionism theory is based on the cognitive thought process that an individual imagines his/herself perpetrating the act. Akers continue to modify differential association to integrate sociological and social behaviorism in psychology to expand the theory into the social learning theory. This study will focus on the progression of Integrative Social Learning Theory as it is used to describe, explain, and predict criminal/deviant behaviors (Bethards, 2014; Cochran, Maskaly, Jones, & Sellers, 2017).

Literature Review

An extensive review of the relevant literature showed that the shift toward increased criminal behavior within the post millennium community is problematic and needs to be better understood (Hanna et al., 2013). Within the fields of psychology and criminology, there have been several theories offered trying to explain why individuals engage in criminal behavior (Akers, 2011; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979; Blackburn, 1993; Bossan et al., 2015; Cochran et al., 2017; Skinner, 1953). One such theory is a social learning theory, which has evolved as an essential tool for understanding traditional criminal behavior. Both psychology and criminology disciplines have played a role in the development of social learning theory (Akers, 2011; Li, Holt, Bossler, & May, 2016).

The literature showed that Bandura focused on several key concepts of the operant conditioning theory: reinforcement, punishment, and motivation to describe, explain and predict criminal behavior. According to Bandura (1978), there are three aspects to motivation: external reinforcement, vicarious reinforcement, and self-reinforcement. External reinforcement is similar to B.F. Skinner's concept of reinforcement and refers to stimuli in the environment that influence the likelihood of a response occurring (Cochran et al., 2017). Vicarious reinforcement is derived from observing other people's behavior being either reinforced or punished. Self-reinforcement refers to one's sense of pride, or to the meeting of standards in one's own behavior (Bossan et al., 2015). Although Bandura's contributions to the development of social learning theory are of major importance, Bandura tended to focus on general criminal behavior and deviance. Other researchers focused on how to apply the theory to specific criminal behaviors. To date, these researchers primarily stem from the field of criminology (Hanna et al., 2013; Li et al., 2016).

It is noteworthy, that social learning theory in criminology is associated with the work of Akers and Burgess (Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018). In criminology the theory has been strongly influenced by the work of Sutherland (1947) and his theory of differential association.

Differential association theory as described by Sutherland posited that criminal behavior was learned through a process of interactions with others. The interactions usually occurred in primary groups, where the person is presented with criminal patterns of behavior, techniques, motivations and definitions toward crime (Cochran et al., 2017). The theory further emphasized the importance of definitions and stated that an imbalance between favorable and unfavorable definitions toward deviant and criminal behaviors, which would result in negative behaviors being exhibited. Several factors, such as frequency, duration, and intensity of the definitions, affected the balance (Tolle, 2017). Moreover, Burgess and Akers (1966) revised differential association theory and developed a theory they termed "differential association-reinforcement." The primary difference between differential association-reinforcement theory and Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory was the conceptualization of the learning process (Cochran et al., 2017; Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018; Tolle, 2017).

Although Sutherland (1947) indicated that a learning process was part of the development of criminal behavior, the exact process was never really expanded upon. While it was assumed that the process was based on Skinner's operant conditioning principles, this was never really articulated in the original theory (Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018). Differential association-reinforcement explicitly conceptualized the learning process as having its basis in operant conditioning (Cochran et al., 2017). The individual's interactions with the environment played a large role. The theory stated that behaviors are often shaped by social interactions, and that positive and negative reinforcement determine the likelihood that the behavior once exhibited, would continue. Negative reinforcement could entail such negative events as being rejected by friends. On the other hand, the acceptance by the group or elevation in status may constitute an example of a positive reinforcement. Additionally, punishment could include being caught by authorities and incarcerated or fined (Li et al., 2016; Miller, & Morris, 2016).

Further, Akers (1985) modified the differential association reinforcement theory and named the new theory "social learning," emphasizing the synergy between the study of individuals and groups. The main concepts of the newly developed social learning theory were differential association and definitions (from Sutherland's 1947 theory), and differential reinforcement and imitation (from behavioral science's learning theory) (Li et al., 2016). Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich (1979) indicate that social learning theory is a general theory of deviance and focuses not only on the learning of criminal techniques, but also the role of drives, motives, and rationalizations (Akers, 2011). The central constructs of the theory can be operationalized, allowing for measurement, and can be tested empirically (Akers 2017). Social learning theory also can be applied toward understanding other types of non-traditional crimes such as cyber or technology related crimes (Akers, 2011; Akers 2017; Li et al., 2016; Tolle, 2017).

The basic assumptions of social learning theory's assert that similar learning experience can produce conforming and deviant behavior. The likelihood of conforming or criminal behavior occurring is a function of the variables operating at the underlying social learning experience. Akers (1998) presented the theory within the context of four hypotheses, which stated that "The individual is more likely to commit violations when:

1. He or she differentially associates with others who commit, model, and support violations of social and legal norms.
2. The violative behavior is differentially reinforced over behavior in conformity to the norm.
3. He or she is more exposed to and observes more deviant than conforming models.
4. His or her own learned definitions are favorable toward committing deviant acts" (p. 51).

The primary learning mechanisms in the theory are differential reinforcement and imitation. The learning mechanisms are believed to operate in a process of differential association and are influenced by definitions (DiLalla, & Bersted, 2015). Differential association occurs first and provides the social environment in which the exposure to definitions and imitation of models occurs (Akers, 2011). The definitions are learned through imitation and through observational learning. The reinforcement can be in the form of tangible rewards of the activity itself (i.e., money) or from social rewards (i.e., increase in peer status). Over time, the imitation fades away and positive or negative reinforcement determine the probability that the activity will continue (Akers, 2017; DiLalla, & Bersted, 2015).

Differential Association.

Differential association in social learning theory is derived almost directly from Sutherland's (1947) conceptualization. Sutherland emphasized the importance of intimate personal groups, especially groups such as family and friends, on individuals (Akers, 2011). He maintained that the family plays the principal role in determining or shaping conformity or deviant behavior for a young child. In adolescence, the significance of the family is reduced, and school, leisure, and recreational peer groups become critical (Akers, 1998). As the individual matures, the propensity to conform or commit criminal acts is influenced by neighbors, churches, authority figures, and the mass media (Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018; Miller, & Morris, 2016).

Sutherland (1947) identified four dimensions or "modalities" along which association could vary: frequency, duration, priority, and intensity. Frequency referred to how often an individual interacts with the group or person. Duration referred to the length of time of the relationship and the amount of time spent in the differential association. The priority here referred to "prior" in time, not a relative ranking of importance (i.e., formed early in life). Intensity referred to the significance, saliency, or importance of the association. Social learning theory maintains that the "modalities" of the association are essential to the extent that they affect the different dimensions of reinforcement (Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018; DiLalla, & Bersted, 2015).

The modalities of association affect reinforcement since the rewarding or adverse outcomes of behavior depend on the extent to which they are socially defined as reasonable, desirable, necessary, or approved by the individual's peers or associates (Sharma, 2018). In fact, Akers (2017) is careful to point out that differential association with peers is not synonymous with peer pressure. Peer pressure is commonly invoked as an explanation of adolescent deviant and criminal behavior. Peer pressure denotes overt expressions of influence to make someone commit some act. Differential association with peers is subtler and often is not perceived by adolescents themselves but is nonetheless very influential. According to social learning theory, the groups, and persons with whom the individual is in differential association provide the social contexts in which all social learning mechanisms operate (Akers, 2011; Sharma, 2018).

Differential Reinforcement

The concept of differential reinforcement was originated from Sutherland's (1947) idea that learning is a component of criminal behavior and from B. F. Skinner's theory of operant conditioning (Akers, 2011). Criminal behavior continues or is directly maintained by the act's consequences, as in operant conditioning. Akers (1917) stated that there would be a high probability of a criminal act occurring in an environment where the individual in the past has been reinforced for behaving in such a manner, and the negative consequences of the behavior have been minor. Since criminal behavior can result in differing schedules of reinforcement and punishment (e.g., being caught), the behavior is subject to complex learning history and is hard to extinguish (Ferguson, & Shum, 2012; Akers, 1917).

Definitions

Social learning theory maintains Sutherland's (1947) original assertions that the learning of criminal behavior involves the learning of techniques to commit the crimes, the learning of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes. The concept of definitions is derived from Sutherland's notion of orienting attitudes toward different behavior (Ferguson, & Shum, 2012). Social learning theory considers exposures to other individuals' shared definitions as an essential component of the process that people use to acquire their definitions. According to Akers (1998), definitions can be thought of as: "a) orientations, b) rationalizations, c) definitions of the situation, and d) other attitudes that label the commission of an act as right or wrong, good, or bad, desirable, or undesirable, justified or unjustified" (p. 78).

Social learning theory further states that definitions can be either general or specific (Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018). General definitions are usually favorable to conforming behavior and unfavorable to aberrant or criminal behavior. General definitions are based on general beliefs, which include religious, moral, and other conventional values. Specific definitions orient an individual to specific acts, allowing those who generally adhere to the norms or laws to rationalize specific aberrant or criminal acts (Akers, 2011). Social learning theory states that the likelihood of engaging in specific acts is a function of the individual's attitudes about the act. The more the individual holds a negative attitude or disapproves of the act, the less likely they are to engage in the act (Akers, 2017). Since the conventional or general beliefs of a society are negative toward criminal behavior, it is theorized that specific definitions have a more significant effect on the commission of specific criminal acts (Akers, 2017; Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018; Sharma, 2018).

According to Beaver and Wright, (2007), definitions that favor criminal or aberrant behavior can be classified as positive or neutralizing. Positive definitions are assumed to occur less frequently than neutralizing definitions. Positive definitions are based on beliefs or attitudes that make the behavior in question desirable or wholly permissible. These definitions are learned primarily through positive reinforcement, often in subcultures. Examples of positive definitions of criminal behavior or deviance can be found in the rhetoric of political dissidents, etc. (Akers, 2011; Beaver & Wright, 2007; Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018).

On the other hand, neutralizing definitions do not do the acts out to be desirable (Beaver & Wright, 2007). The neutralizing definitions excuse or attempt to justify the behavior (e.g., thou shalt not kill unless in the line of duty). Neutralizing definitions view the acts as undesirable but see the unfortunate side effects as justified given the situation.

The learning of these neutralizing definitions can be accomplished in mainstream society outside of any subcultures (Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018). Neutralizing definitions incorporate notions of verbalizations or disclaimers and rationalization (e.g., everyone else lies on their tax return.)

Neutralizing definitions attempt to reduce the amount of guilt or self-censure an individual experiences after engaging in some aberrant or criminal behavior. The concept of neutralizing definitions is similar to Bandura's (1979) concept of moral disengagement (Akers, 2011; Beaver & Wright, 2007; Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018).

Imitation.

Social learning theory defines imitation as committing behavior modeled on and observing similar behavior in others (Akers, 2011). The actual imitation of the modeled behavior is affected by vicarious reinforcement. The theory states that modeling is essential in the initial phases of acquiring a behavior but less so in the maintenance or cessation of behavioral patterns once they have been established (Akers, 1998). Social learning theory holds that the media plays a role in the imitation process by modeling vicarious reinforcement and desensitization toward violence (Bethards, 2014). The media often provide additional reference groups and sources of exposure to criminal and non-criminal patterns of behavior. Nevertheless, the effects of the media are believed to be weaker than face-to-face or primary group interactions (Bethards, 2014; Horsburgh, & Ippolito, 2018).

Supporting Research and Criticisms.

Social learning theory, although popular, has been criticized for its lack of empirical testing in applied natural settings (Bethards, 2014). Moreover, Akers et al. (2011) indicated that, although there has been a sizeable amount of research that, post hoc, appears to support social learning theory, there has been a lack of research specifically designed to test its propositions. Akers et al. (1979) conducted a study on social learning and adolescent drinking and drug behavior to address the criticisms. Data for the study were collected by administering a self-report questionnaire to 3065 students attending grades 7 through 12 in three midwestern states in the U.S. The questionnaire measured imitation, differential association, definitions, and differential reinforcement.

Thus, imitation and modeling were measured by a series of items asking both users and non-users of alcohol, marijuana, stimulants, depressants, and more potent drugs they had seen anyone they admire use the substances (Mearns, 2009). An Imitation Index was developed for each substance by summing the number of categories checked by each respondent for that substance. The differential association was measured by asking respondents to report the usual qualities (i.e., the degree of attitudinal approval or disapproval) that they perceived were held by their important reference groups towards alcohol, marijuana, stimulants, depressants, and more potent drugs (Akers, 2011). The question also was asked separately for significant adults, peers, and religious groups. These became single-item measures (Akers, 2011; Mearns, 2009; Beaver & Wright, 2007).

The intensity of peer pressure was measured by asking each respondent to report, for each substance, the portion of his or her friends who used it (Akers 2017). The proportion scale consisted of the following categories, none, almost none, less than half, more than half, and almost all (Akers, 2011). Frequency and duration of peer association were measured by asking the same question regarding the proportion of friends with whom the participant associated most often and those with whom the subject had associated with the longest (Akers 2017). Definitions were measured by items relating to one's neutralizing definitions, law-abiding/violating definitions, and positive/negative definitions (Akers 2017). Three items each for drugs and alcohol measured the neutralizing definitions. These items measured the strength of the agreement with three techniques of neutralization (Akers et al., 1979). The techniques were: condemning the condemners, denial of injury, and denial of responsibility (Akers et al., 1979). Law-abiding/violating definitions were measured by a scale of attitudes toward alcohol and drug laws and the law in general (Akers et al., 1979). The respondent's attitude toward alcohol, marijuana, stimulants, depressants, and more potent drugs were measured by a single item which asked about their attitude toward each substance (Akers et al., 1979). The response categories ranged from approval, through mixed or ambivalent, to disapproval.

The study measured differential reinforcement (social and nonsocial) by breaking the concept down into rewards-costs of use, overall reinforcement balance, and usual effects (Akers et al., 1979). An index of rewards minus costs of use was calculated by summing the total perceived "good things" to happen from using each substance and then subtracting the total of perceived "bad things" (Akers et al., 1979). An overall reinforcement balance was measured by respondents' assessment of whether, on balance, "mainly good," "mainly bad," or "about as much good as bad" would result. The assessment for users was based on their personal experience and for non-users on their perception of what would result (Akers, 1998).

A regression analysis indicated that differential association, differential reinforcement, definitions, and imitation combined account for 68% of the variance of marijuana use and 55% of the variance in alcohol use (Akers, 1998). The findings supported social learning theory and provided a model for operationalizing its central constructs (Akers, 2011; Akers et al., 1979).

Skinner and Fream (1997) also attempted to address the criticisms of social learning theory. They researched the ability of the theory to explain the etiology of non-traditional crimes. The study used undergraduates from the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business and Economics, and Engineering from a significant southwestern university in the U.S. The sample size for the study was 581, with 60.8% of the participants being male and 39.1% female. The survey used a self-report questionnaire to measure criminal computer activity last year and the influence of differential association, imitation, definitions, and differential reinforcement. Skinner and Fream (1997) were interested in deterrence, the perceived certainty of being caught, and the severity of punishment.

Moral Disengagement

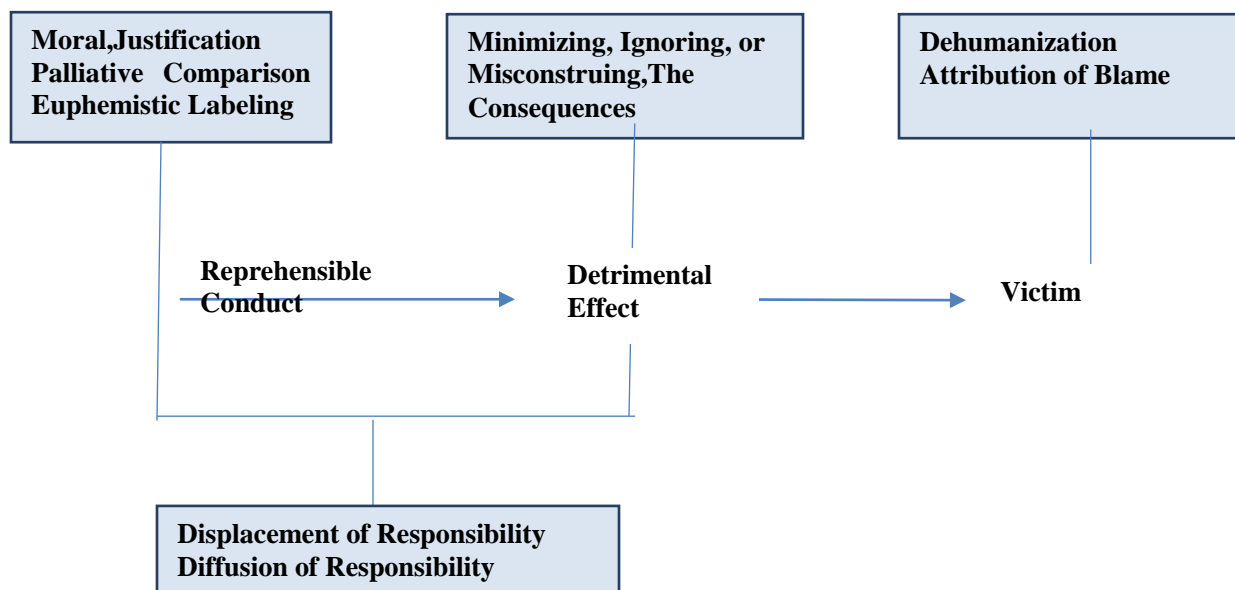
Social learning theory states that neutralizing definitions and reinforcement may interact to influence the continuation of criminal activity (Bethards, 2014). However, Akers (1998) stated that the concept of neutralizing definitions was similar if not identical to Bandura's model of moral disengagement. Bandura's model is a more in-depth examination of the processes involved in the rationalization and justification of deviant or aberrant behavior (Bandura, 1990a; Bandura et al., 1996). Bandura attempted to explain how individuals who are engaged in aberrant behavior justify their activities (Bandura, 1990b; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bethards, 2014).

According to moral disengagement, people tend to refrain from engaging in behavior that violates their moral standards (Bandura, 1990a). Such actions would lead to self-condemnation and possibly self-sanctions. The model holds that moral standards play the role of regulating our behaviors (Bandura et al., 1996). However, these standards do not necessarily function as fixed internal controls of behavior. The self-regulatory system does not operate unless activated to disengage self-sanctions from the behavior (Mearns, 2009). Social cognitive theory refers to these as mechanisms of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1990b; Bandura et al., 1996; Mearns, 2009).

Bandura et al. (1996) stated that the self-regulatory system is comprised of four major components that separate internal moral control from detrimental conduct (see Figure 1). An individual can disengage self-sanctions by 1) re-construing the conduct, 2) obscuring the personal causal agency, 3) misrepresenting or disregarding the negative consequences of the action, 4) vilification of victims, and devaluing and blaming them (Bandura et al., 1996; Bandura, 1990a).

Figure

1: Self-regulatory system



Source: Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency (p.365) by Bandura et al. (1996). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71.

Furthermore, language plays a vital role in shaping an individual's perception of his or her actions (Bandura et al., 1996; Bandura, 1990a). Reprehensible conduct can be masked by euphemistic language, and, in some cases, it can allow the conduct to be seen as respectable. The individual also can be relieved of a sense of personal responsibility by convoluted verbiage or by comparison to other more injurious behavior. The excellent or palliative comparison is more effective when more flagrant activities are used in the comparison (e.g., comparing embezzling money from a large corporation to the poisoning of the environment by multinational corporations). Another set of dissociative practices operates by distorting the relationship between the agent's actions and the effects of the actions (Mearns, 2009). With a displacement of responsibility, individuals view their actions as arising from social pressures and do not see themselves as responsible for their actions. Self-censure is reduced because individuals are no longer actual agents of their actions. The action can also be ascribed to compelling circumstances and not construed as a personal decision (Bandura, 1990a; Bandura et al., 1996; Mearns, 2009).

The personal agency can be further obscured by diffusion of responsibility, which often leads to the segmentation of duties, where each segment by itself is benign, although the totality is harmful. Group decisions also can be used to diffuse the responsibility (Bandura, 1990a; Bandura et al., 1996). Another method to reduce self-censure is to disregard or distort the consequences of an action. Ignoring the detrimental consequences of the actions, as in selective inattention or through cognitive distortion, reduces the feelings of guilt (Bandura, 1990a; Bandura et al., 1996). As described by Bandura et al. (1996), the last set of disengagement practices focuses on the recipients of the acts. Self-censure can be disengaged or weakened by stripping the victim of human attributes or shifting the blame onto the victim. As a result of dehumanization, "the victim is viewed as sub-human, not as a person with feelings. Blaming the victim or circumstances allows the perpetrators to view themselves as victims who were provoked. The perpetrator's actions now become construed as defensive (Bandura, 1990a; Bandura et al., 1996). The victims are blamed and accused of bringing the actions upon themselves.

Supporting Research and Criticisms of Bandura's SLT.

Bandura et al. (1996) conducted a study on aggression and moral disengagement in children. The purpose of the study was to test a proposed causal structure of paths of influence through which moral disengagement affected detrimental conduct. The participants in the study were 124 children in the last year of elementary school and 675 junior high school students in grades 6-8 from public schools in Rome, Italy. The mean age of the participants was 11.8 years. There were 438 males and 361 females. The students were administered questionnaires in their classrooms by female experimenters. Data on the variables of interest also were obtained from parents, teachers, and peers of the students. The scales were administered individually to the parents and teachers. Moral disengagement was measured using a multifaceted scale that measured the proneness to moral disengagement of different forms of detrimental conduct in diverse contexts and interpersonal relationships (Mearns, 2009). Each of Bandura's eight mechanisms of moral disengagement was represented by a subset of four items. The social contexts encompassed by the questionnaire included educational, familial, community, and peer relations. The items were rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale, which asked children to rate their degree of acceptance of moral exoneration for certain conduct on an agree-disagree continuum (Bandura et al., 1996).

A principal-components factor analysis with varimax orthogonal rotation revealed a single factor structure that accounted for 16.2% of the variance (Bandura et al., 1996). Since no sub-factors emerged, the responses to the items were summed to provide a composite measure of moral disengagement. Cronbach's alpha for the measure was reported at .82 (Bandura et al., 1996). Data on the children's aggressive, prosocial, and transgressive behavior was obtained from various sources, and diverse assessment methods were used (Bandura et al., 1996). The sample included the children, their parents, teachers, and peers. The methods included personality questionnaires and peer sociometric ratings. Several control items were included in each questionnaire. The children were administered two scales to measure prosocial behavior and interpersonal aggression (Bandura et al., 1996). The scales used a 3-point response format. Physical and verbal aggression was measured in 15 items which assessed the frequency with which children fought with or verbally disparaged others (Bandura et al., 1996). Prosocial behavior was measured by seven items that assessed the children's helpfulness, sharing, kindness, and cooperation.

The children's teachers rated the children in their classroom for physical and verbal aggression and prosocial behavior. A shortened six-item questionnaire was developed from the children's questionnaire, and it also was cast in the third person (Bandura et al., 1996). The reported Cronbach's alpha for peer ratings of prosocial behavior was .61 (Bandura et al., 1996). The Cronbach's alpha for the other three data sources (self, parents, teachers) was all in the .80s to .90s (Bandura et al., 1996). The study also used sociometric peer nominations to measure prosocial and aggressive behavior (Bandura et al., 1996).

Children were given a booklet containing the names of children in their class along with ten items. Three items measured aggressive behavior, three items measured prosocial behavior, and four measured peer popularity and aggression. For aggression, the children were asked to circle the names of three classmates who fight a lot, insult other children, and often hurt them. For prosocial behavior, the children circled the names of three classmates who helped others, shared things, and tried to make sad people happier (Bandura et al., 1996). Peer popularity was measured by having the children select three classmates they would like to play with and study. They were also asked to select three classmates they would neither want to play with nor study with, which was considered the measure of peer rejection (Bandura et al., 1996).

The junior high school level students were administered two additional scales that measured the affective and cognitive aspects of aggressive and transgressive conduct relevant for older children (Bandura et al., 1996). The hostile rumination scale consisted of 1 items that assessed the level of preoccupation with personal grievances and getting even. It had a reported Cronbach's alpha of .86 (Bandura et al., 1996). The irascibility scale consisted of 14 items that assessed petulance in social transactions and weak restraints over anger with minimal provocation. The Cronbach's alpha for the irascibility scale was .84 (Bandura et al., 1996). Guilt and restitution were measured with a 15-item scale that dealt with self-regulation of transgressive conduct (causing physical injury, being destructive to property, verbally abusive, being deceitful, or committing theft) by anticipatory self-sanctions (Bandura et al., 1996). The reported Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .79 (Bandura et al., 1996). Delinquent behavior was measured using relevant items from the Achenbach and Edelbrock Child Behavior Checklist (Bandura et al., 1996). The checklist covered 22 items for males and 19 items for females. Both the mothers and the children were administered the items from the checklist. The mothers and the children recorded whether they engaged in specific antisocial activities such as theft, lying, truancy, destructiveness, and the use of alcohol and drugs. The Cronbach's alpha for the parents was .77, for females .77, and .85 for males (Bandura et al., 1996).

The results indicated that disengagement was unrelated to both familial socioeconomic status and age (Bandura et al., 1996). Some interesting gender differences were found. Males had a greater readiness to provide moral justifications for detrimental conduct, mask the conduct in euphemistic language, minimize the conduct of injurious effects, and dehumanize and blame victims (Bandura et al., 1996). Overall, the most used disengagement mechanisms were construing injurious behavior as serving righteous purposes, disowning responsibility for harmful effects, and devaluing those maltreated (Bandura et al., 1996). The examination of the relationship of moral disengagement with prosocial and detrimental conduct indicated that high moral disengages were less prosaically oriented and more likely to be rejected by peers. High moral disengages were also found to be more likely to engage in delinquent pursuits (Bandura et al., 1996). Bandura et al. (1996) concluded that males exhibited higher levels of moral disengagement than females. The study concluded that the bias might influence the male's higher levels of aggression to disengage moral self-sanctions from injurious conduct.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This study aimed to explore the different dimensions of social learning theory and its effectiveness in describing, explaining, and predicting crime and deviant behaviors (Tolle, 2017). Social learning theory posits that learning occurs in formal and informal settings, but it often occurs in informal settings and is largely unintentional. These informal settings are social and do not occur within a programmed plan of study or training. Lave and Wenger (1991) state, "In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reliable processes that happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (p. 35). This theory is unique because, unlike other adult learning theories, which focus on behavioral and psychological explanations of how learned behaviors occur.

The social learning theory presents a perspective that learning is ultimately shaped by the context that exists within the learning environment, which could lead to the prevention and intervention of crime and deviant behaviors through the practice of law enforcement, programs that range from micro to macro practices (Hansman, 2010). Subsequently, the broad dimensions of social learning theory make it conducive to informal and formal settings. Wenger (1998) further expanded the social learning theory to include the communities of practice model. Communities of practice is a concept that develops because of the connections made between practitioners (Wenger, 1998). It focuses on participating in social practices that allow individuals to learn from one another, enhance skills, and improve performances. The community of practice model theorizes that participating in social practices will result in belonging to a group or community. In the context of this study, the workplace is viewed as a community.

Cacciattolo (2015) states that approximately 80% of learning that occurs in the workplace is informal. Informal learning at work usually takes place during social interactions and everyday work practices. These informal means of learning include self-directed learning, networking, coaching, and mentoring. Several research studies have found that individuals tend to learn more from their peers and come up with solutions to frequently occurring problems in the workplace (Felstead, Fuller, Unwin, Ashton, Butler, & Lee, 2005; Hager & Johnsson, 2009).

Numerous studies have been identified in the literature that uses social learning theory and communities of practice to investigate informal interactions and how individuals learn from others at work because of these interactions (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999; Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson, & Unwin, 2005). Only one study has been identified in the literature that studies explicitly whether communities of practice exist between hearing and deaf individuals in the workplace (Wells, 2008). Wells (2008) provided several recommendations for future research on deaf individuals in that the sharing of knowledge and information between practitioners and employees could lead to career advancement and promotion and a happy and productive work environment. The quality of social learning in the workplace is subsequently the foundation of a positive community of practice.

The social learning theory is the foundation of the communities of practice model, which can be applied to the study of practitioners and their interactions in a law enforcement and behavior modification work environment. It can also be applied to examining how social participation within and outside of the crime prevention and intervention community is a process of learning and making meaning from life experiences. Wenger's (1998) concept of participation, called a community of practice, identifies "four components of social learning theory.

- 1) Meaning a way to talk about the ability to experience life and the world as meaningful.
- 2) Practice: talking about shared historical and social resources and viewpoints that can support mutual engagement
- 3) Community: talking about social structures, whether participation in these social structures as recognized as competent
- 4) Identity: a way of talking about the impact learning has on an individual and in turn create a personal history in the context of community" (p.5)

A community of practice develops when practitioners and connect with other criminal justice practitioners and share experiences. The shared experiences of coworkers help form a community of practice in which behaviors and ideas are shared to benefit better relations within the crime-fighting community (Tolle, 2017). In this community of practice, coworkers constantly undergo negotiating ways in which to share knowledge.

Wenger (1998) did emphasize that it was not necessary for participants in a community of practice to "interact intensely with everyone else or know each other very well, but the less they do, the more their configuration looks like a personal network or a set of interrelated practices rather than a single community of practice" (p.126). Participants are also not necessarily responsible for evaluating their colleague's actions or behavior. Criminal justice practitioners have a wealth of knowledge based on personal and professional experience that can be the components of a productive work environment. The creation of a community-based work environment strengthens the relationships between practitioners and, consequently, maximize outcomes. A strong community of practice also strengthens diversity in the workplace and creates an environment in which new strategies and solutions are developed for a more successful day-to-day workplace environment.

Wenger's (1998) indicators of a community of practice will be used in analyzing whether a community of practice exists within the workplace environments of the participants in this study. Effective communication is critical to informal learning. Due to the importance of social interaction and participation needed in informal learning, this research aims to determine whether an influential community of practice exists in work environments with apparent differences in communication styles between deaf and hearing individuals. The analysis of these indicators was conducted in a previous study by Wells (2008). Since this study is based on the review of literature that explores the breadth and depth of social learning theory and its benefits to communities of practice, it is anticipated that it will add to the body of knowledge and offer more insight for future study on this topic.

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