

Q Discuss the fundamental Postulates of Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory with examples.

1) Introduction:

In criminology, differential association is a theory developed by Edwin Sutherland, proposing that through interaction with others, individuals learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for criminal behaviour. Differential Association theory is the most talked-about of the learning theories of deviance.

Differential Association Theory Predicts

individual will choose the criminal path when the balance of definitions for law-breaking exceeds those of law-abiding

This tendency will be reinforced if social association provides active people in the person's life

This will even more triggered when an individual comes under high status people in the early stages of their life, making high possibility to follow their first steps.

2) Pathway towards Differential Association Theory:

Before Sutherland the explanation of criminal behavior ^{were} varied and inconsistent.

Due to above reason, law Professor Jerome Michael and philosopher Mortimer J. Adler asserted that criminology had not produced any scientifically-backed theories for criminal activity.

This made Sutherland to use rigorous scientific methods to develop Differential Association theory.

This thinking of Sutherland was influenced by the Chicago School of sociologists. Particularly he was influenced by 3 sources.

1 The work of Shaw and McKay, which investigated the way delinquency was distributed geographically in Chicago.

2 The work of Sellin, Wirth, and Sutherland himself, which found that crime in modern societies is the result of conflict between different cultures.

Sutherland's own work on Professional thieves, which found that in order to become a Professional thief, one must become a member of a group of Professional thieves

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At last, He outlined his theory in 1939 in the third edition of his book Principles of criminology. He then revised the theory for the fourth edition of the book in 1947.

3) Nine fundamental Principles of Sutherland's Differential Association theory:

Differential Association theory contains nine fundamental Principles, and these are as follows:

3.1) According to Sutherland Criminal Behaviour is learned :- The first Principle of Edwin Sutherland asserts that criminal behaviour is learned and not an inherent trait. Sutherland firmly refuted the notion ~~that~~ of a "born criminal." He posited that offenders do not spontaneously develop criminal behaviour, but rather acquire it through social interactions and exposure to deviant norms. He eloquently stated, "Criminal behaviour is not a phenomenon of nature,

but a consequence of association."

Example:

for instance, if someone has more contact with people who think or believe that it is wrong to break rules, then they are less likely to commit crime. on the other hand, if someone has more links with people who believe it is ok to break rules, then they will be more likely to commit crimes

3.2) Criminal Behaviour is learned through

Interactions: According to Sutherland behavior is learned via interactions with others (who may already be engaging in such conduct) through a process of communication which is primarily verbal but may include gestures. It is quite clear that Sutherland supported and championed the nurture debate by the notion of "born criminal" which is linked to Lombroso's theory of Atavism. He further said that individuals are more likely to engage in criminal activities if their associations with procriminal groups outweigh their associations with ~~pro~~ anti-criminal groups.

Examples of verbal communication →

A person might learn about stealing techniques through conversations with experienced thieves.

Observing someone discreetly passing illegal substances can also contribute to learning ←

Examples of non-verbal communication

3.3) Close-knit groups are Primary sources:

Sutherland's theory emphasizes that small groups and close relationships are the primary sources of learning criminal behaviour. He suggests that the influence of these intimate social circles outweighs the impact of mass media in shaping criminal conduct. This implies that direct interactions with individuals engage in criminal activities have a more significant impact on an individual's likelihood to engage in such behaviour compared to exposure through media.

Example

For instance, a teenager who spends a lot of time with a group of friends involved in graffiti vandalism might learn the techniques and motivations for this behavior directly from their peers. This close-knit group becomes the primary source of their exposure to criminal conduct, overshadowing any influence that mass media might have on their actions.

3.4) The learning Process Imparts Interaction concerning:

The Learning Process Imparts instruction concerning



The requisite techniques for the perpetration of the crime

The rationalization of wrongdoing to oneself and others

Sutherland underscores that individuals not only learn how to carry out criminal acts but also how to mentally justify and rationalize their actions. This dual learning process contributes to the adoption and continuation of criminal behaviour.

Examples of Specific Techniques



A person may learn intricate methods of pickpocketing from an experienced thief in their social circle. This could involve tactics like distraction, swift hand movements etc.

Someone involved in white-collar crimes, like embezzlement, might develop justifications to ease their conscience.

They may convince themselves that they are taking from a wealthy corporation that won't feel the loss, or that they deserve the extra money for their hard work.

Examples of Rationalization



3.5) Legal Codes Interpretations Influence Criminal Behaviour: Sutherland is suggesting that individuals develop their motivations and inclinations towards criminal behaviour based on how they interpret the legal codes in their

specific geographical area. This interpretation whether favourable or unfavourable, influences their tendency towards engaging in criminal conduct.

Example

for instance two individuals living in the same city may interpret the legal code regarding property rights differently:

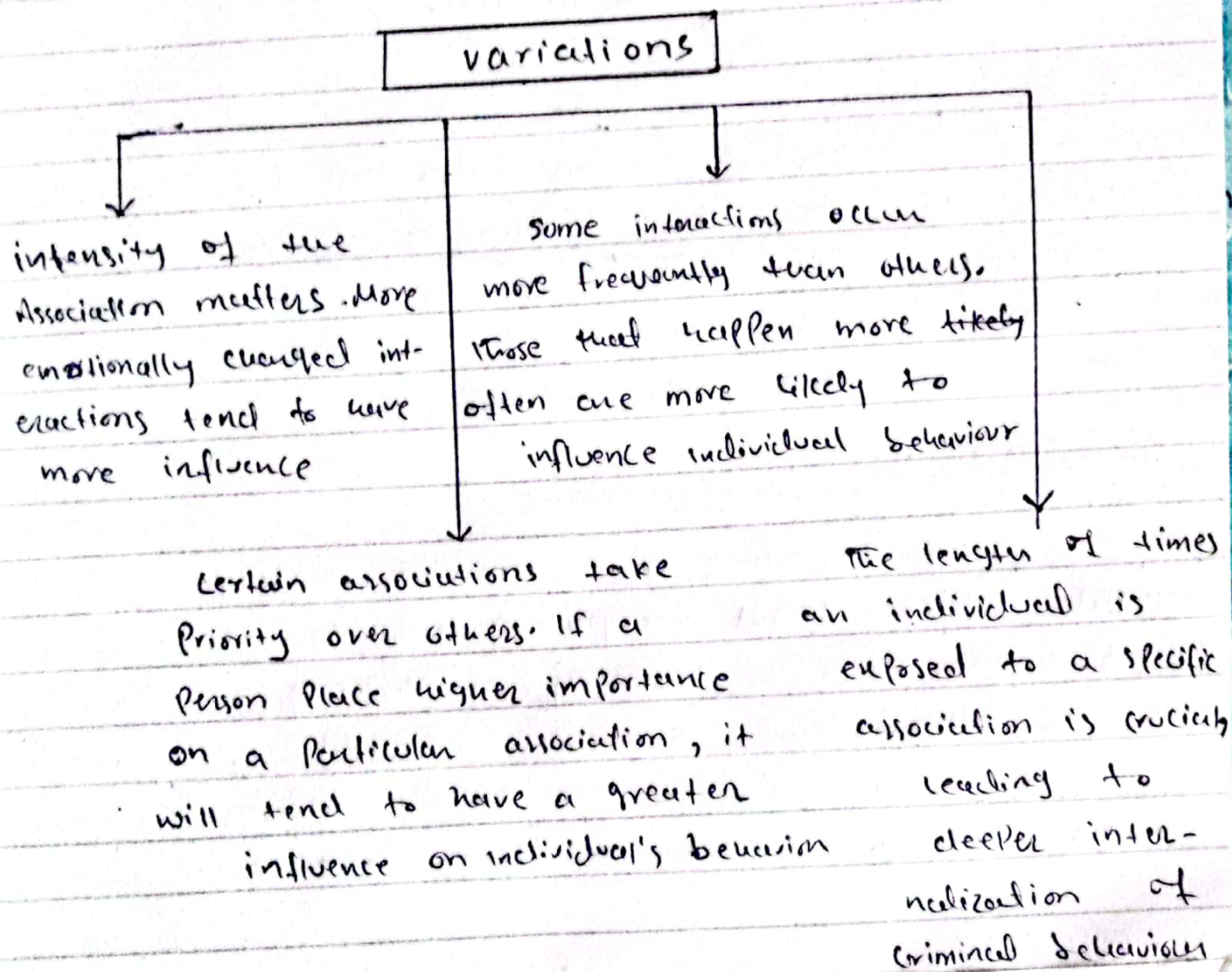
Person A may interpret as strict and protective, making them less likely to engage in property-related crimes, such as theft or vandalism

Person B may, on the other hand, interpret it as lax or poorly enforced, making them more likely to engage in property-related crimes

3.6) Overexposure to Pro-criminal Interpretations encourage Criminality: In Sutherland's theory, he asserts that when an individual is exposed to more interpretations of legal codes that favor violating the law compared to interpretations that discourage such behaviour, they are more likely to choose a path of criminality. The above aforementioned example showing how the exposure of individuals to different interpretations contribute in their criminal behaviour.

3.7) All Differential Associations are not equal: Sutherland's theory suggests that not all associations or interactions have the same impact on an individual's likelihood to engage

in criminal behaviours. He provides four dimension to further elaborate this:



3.4) Common Mechanism for Criminal & non-criminal Behaviours: He further says that the process of learning criminal behaviours through interactions with others relies on the same mechanisms that are used in learning about any other behaviour.

Example

Just like learning how to cook or ride a bike, acquiring criminal behaviours can also through interactions with others. For instance,

a person might pick up shoplifting techniques from a friend in a similar way they learn how to bake cookies from a family member.

3.9) Criminal Behaviour can be output of generalized needs : Sutherland at least says that criminal behaviour could be an expression of generalized needs and values, but they don't explain the behaviour because non-criminal behaviour expresses the same needs and values.

Example

for instance, a successful entrepreneur might achieve legal recognition and status through legal means, such as building a thriving business. on the other hand, someone engaged in criminal behaviour might pursue the same recognition & status through illicit activities like organized crime.

4) Criticism on Differential Association Theory

Despite having merits, Sutherland's theory has also faced criticisms which are as follows

George Vold has maintained that Sutherland has ignored the role of secondary contact and formal groups in criminality

Clarence Ray Jeffery holds that this theory fails to explain the origin of criminality as criminality has to exist before it can be learned

Margaret Elliot says Sutherland theory explains only systematic criminal behaviour. In this context, Sutherland seems to refer to behavior that has evolved into a lifestyle for an individual, accompanied by a belief system that rationalizes & justifies it.

Colbeck maintains that an individual does not learn every kind of behaviour from others; many acts are learnt naturally.

Donald Cressey says Sutherland doesn't fully explore the implications of the learning process itself as it affects different individuals.

5) Conclusion:

Sutherland's theory of differential association revolutionized criminology by emphasizing that criminal behaviour is learned through social interactions, challenging the notion that it solely stems from individual's traits. He contended that individuals acquire criminal tendencies from their close-knit social circles, where the frequency, intensity, priority, and duration of interactions play crucial roles. Moreover, he argued that generalized needs and values could manifest in both criminal and non-criminal behaviours, thus underscoring that they alone don't explain criminal conduct. His theory is often considered an extension of Edwin Sutherland's earlier work, aligns with the broader tradition of social learning theory in criminology. As Ronald Akers noted, "Sutherland's theory brought forth a paradigm shift, emphasizing the crucial role of social interactions in development."

of Criminal Behavior."

"... Crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of their occupation"

Edwin Sutherland
