

# Lecture 10: Social Learning Theory; Social Bonding and Control Theories

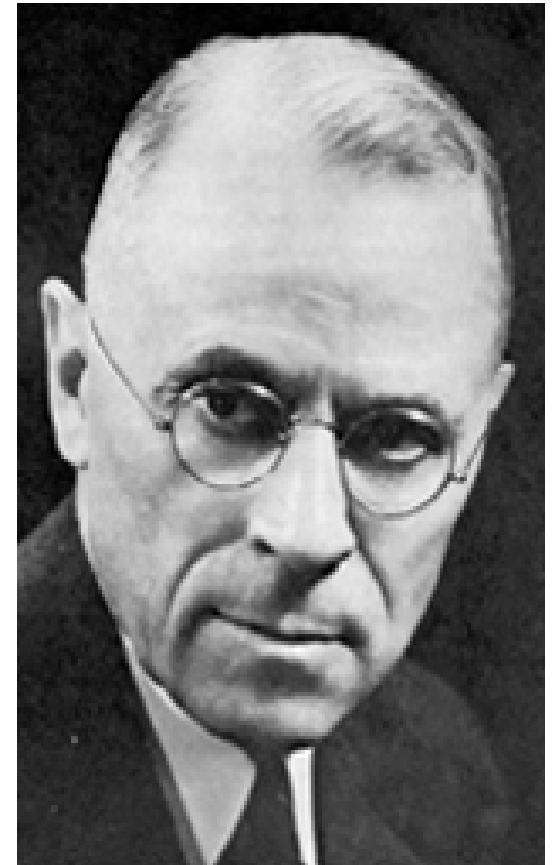


# Assumptions of Social Learning Theory

- Approach developed by Albert Bandura (and others).
- Human behavior is learned, or shaped by social and physical rewards and punishments an individual faces in their lives (innate predispositions *unimportant*)

# Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory (DAT)

- Mainly a *processual* theory about how individuals come to commit crimes.
- Also has a *structural* component because considers *macro-level* variables such as social organization and group conflict.
- Theory outlined in nine statements.



# **CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR IS *LEARNED...***

- **Not inborn, nor predetermined.**
- **Anyone can learn.**

**...IN INTERACTIONS WITH  
OTHERS, IN A PROCESS OF  
COMMUNICATION**

- Includes gestures.
- Verbal interactions.

# **LEARNING OCCURS WITHIN INTIMATE PERSONAL GROUPS**

- Work environments**
- Peer networks**
- Media plays little role**

# **LEARNING INCLUDES:**

- Techniques**
- Motives**
- Drives**
- Rationalizations**
- Attitudes**

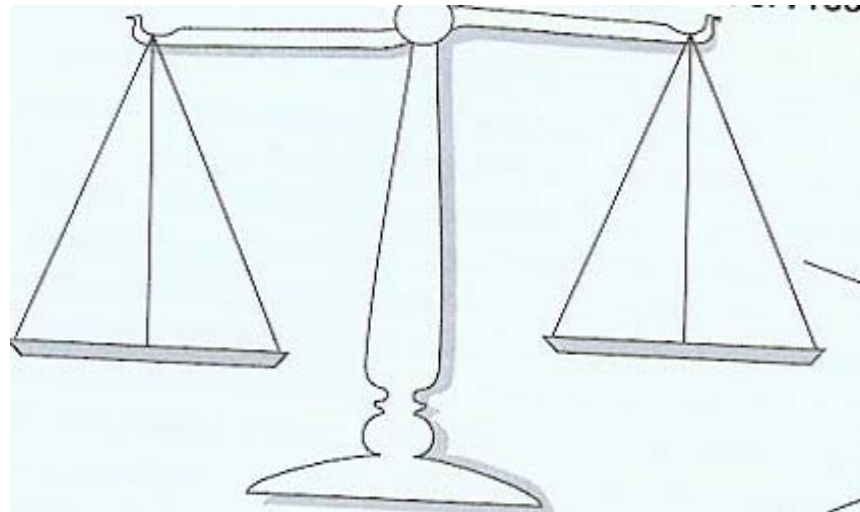
**SPECIFIC DIRECTION OF  
MOTIVES, DRIVES, ETC. IS  
LEARNED FROM  
DEFINITIONS OF LEGAL  
CODES AS FAVORABLE OR  
UNFAVORABLE.**



**ONE ENGAGES IN CRIME  
BECAUSE OF AN EXCESS OF  
DEFINITIONS FAVORABLE TO  
LAW VIOLATION OVER  
DEFINITIONS UNFAVORABLE TO  
LAW-BREAKING.**

- **This is the principle of  
*"differential association."***

| <b><u>Definitions favorable:</u></b> | <b><u>Definitions unfavorable:</u></b> |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Fair play</b>                     | <b>Cheating and shortcuts are OK</b>   |
| <b>Forgive and forget</b>            | <b>I don't get mad, I get even</b>     |
| <b>Good always wins</b>              | <b>Sometimes evil wins</b>             |
| <b>Give others a chance</b>          | <b>Take advantage of suckers</b>       |



**DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION  
MAY VARY IN FREQUENCY,  
DURATION, PRIORITY, AND  
INTENSITY.**

- Accounts for rates and life-cycle of offending.**

**LEARNING CRIMINAL  
BEHAVIOR INVOLVES ALL THE  
MECHANISMS INVOLVED IN  
ANY OTHER LEARNING.**

**WHILE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR IS AN EXPRESSION OF GENERAL NEEDS AND VALUES, IT IS NOT EXPLAINED BY THOSE GENERAL NEEDS AND VALUES, SINCE NONCRIMINAL BEHAVIOR IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE SAME NEEDS AND VALUES.**

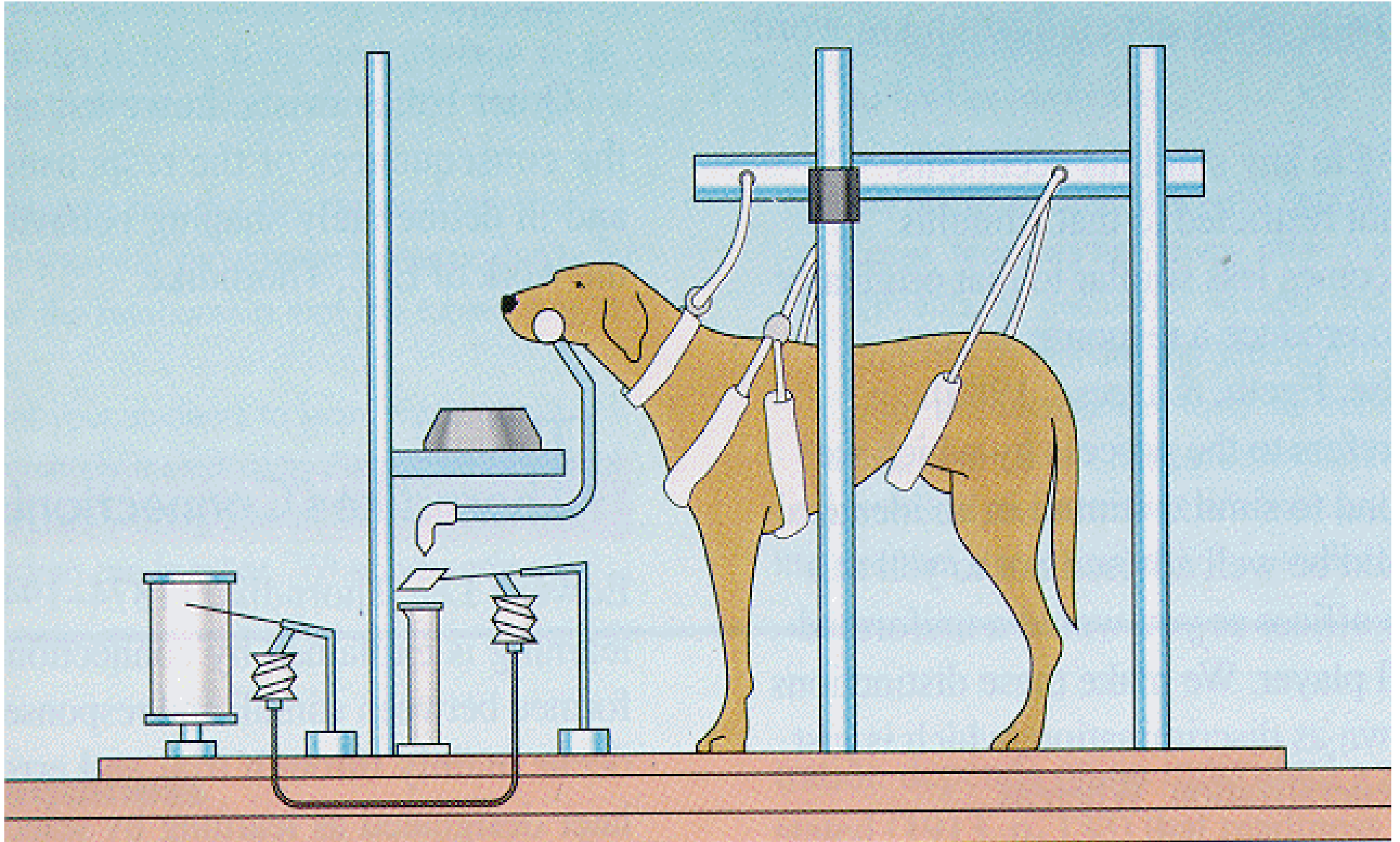
# Summary of DAT

- Criminal behavior is learned.
- Not simply association with “bad individuals,” but learning from them.
- How can a researcher measure an excess of law violating definitions?

# Aker's Social Learning Theory (SLT)

- An extension of DAT.
- Builds on statement 8 in DAT by clarifying more concretely what are “all the mechanisms of learning” in Sutherland's theory.
- Considers learning processes such as classical conditioning and imitation

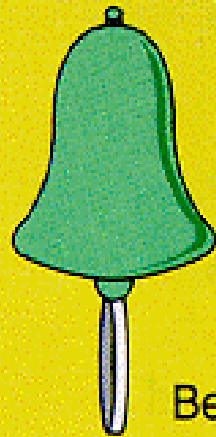
# **CLASSIC CONDITIONING: “two stimuli become associated by repeated pairing”**





**1. Preconditioning phase**

Neutral stimulus



Bell

leads to



No response



Unconditioned stimulus (UCS)



Food

elicits

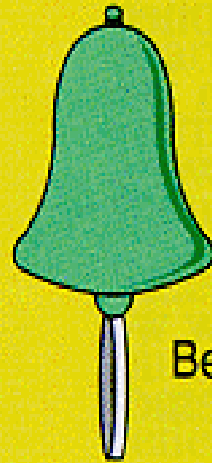


Unconditioned response (UCR)

Salivation

**2. Conditioning  
phase**

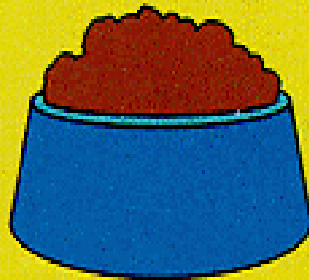
Neutral stimulus



Bell

+

Unconditioned  
stimulus (UCS)



Food

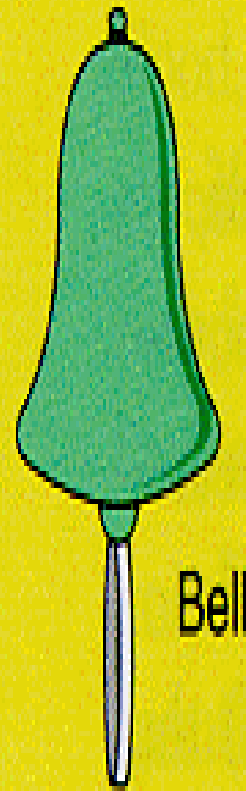
elicits  
(several  
pairings)



Salivation

### 3. Postconditioning phase

Conditioned stimulus (CS)



Bell

elicits



Conditioned response (CR)



Salivation

# Imitation: "*learning to do an act from seeing it done*".

early social interaction... imitation

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# Social Learning Theory cont.

- Theory explains learning and maintenance of criminal behavior (e.g., constant rewards and punishment encourages burglar to continue to steal).
- Akers relies on four major concepts: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation.

# 1.) Differential Association

- Similar to Sutherland's concept.
- Process where individual is exposed to normative definitions favorable or unfavorable to illegal or law-abiding behavior.
- Exposure to families, neighbors, churches, teachers, etc. Most important if associations occur early (priority), occupy a lot of time (duration), occur often (frequency), and are occur among closer relationships (intensity).

## 2.) Definitions

- Similar to Sutherland's ideas: Definitions influence criminality.
- Definitions: one's attitudes, or meanings that one attaches to given behavior.
- May involve general definitions about legal and social rules and specific definitions that orient people to specific acts.

# **Neutralizing Definitions**

**1. Denial of responsibility -- It's not my fault; I didn't have a choice**

**2. Denial of injury -- It's no big deal; They have too much money**

**3. Denial of victim -- They had it coming; They had a bad attitude**

**4. Condemnation of the condemners -- Everybody does it; Why me?**

**5. Appeal to higher loyalties -- Only cowards back down; protecting**



### 3.) Differential Reinforcement

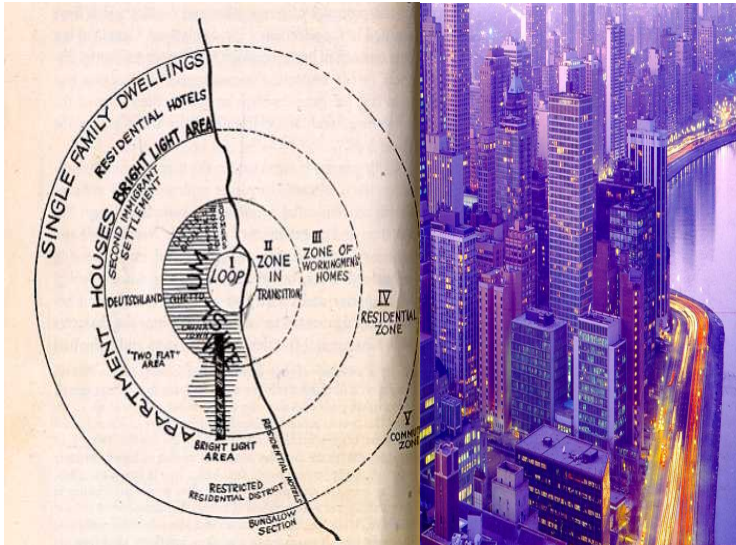
- Anticipated or actual rewards and punishments that follow or are the consequence of behavior.
- Social environment reinforces behavior.
- Reinforcers from non-social environment (e.g., drugs and alcohol).

## 4.) Imitation

- Engage in behavior after observation of similar behavior.
- More important in the actual acquisition and performance of novel behavior than in the maintenance.
- Example: School shootings?



# Linking Social Structure and Social Learning



Social Structure: →  
society, class,  
school, race, age, etc

Social  
Learning

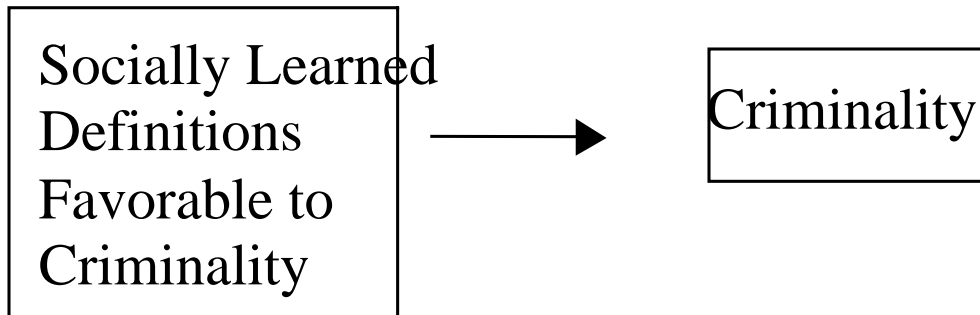
Criminal  
Behavior

Non-criminal  
behavior

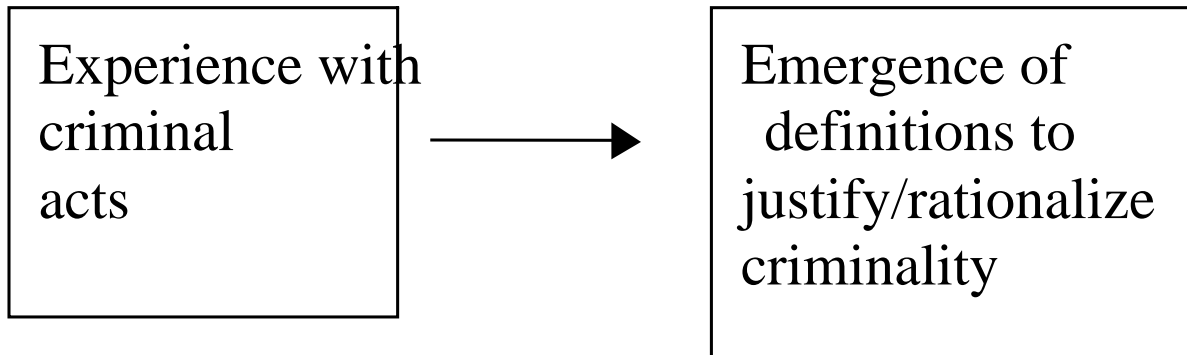
# Social Learning Theory and Temporal Sequence

- SLT *mainly* predicts that delinquency/criminality is a *consequence* of learning social definitions favorable to crime.
- But it could be that individuals become delinquent first (e.g., as a result of rational choice), and associate with other “deviants” later (e.g., “birds of a feather flock together”).

## Definitions CAUSE criminality



## Criminality CAUSES socially and individually learned Definitions



# Temporal Sequence cont.

- Akers argues that SLT does NOT only predict that definitions precede and thus cause criminality. First imitation of behavior without thought of right and wrong, and then possible criminality and retrospective justification.
- HOWEVER, DEVIANT ASSOCIATIONS WILL PROCEED CRIMINALITY MORE FREQUENTLY THAN CRIMINALITY PROCEEDING DEVIANT ASSOCIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS.

# Empirical Tests and Issue of Temporal Sequence

- Longitudinal studies find support that socially learned definitions develop with differential association with deviants.
- Also evidence that sequence of learning is complex and involves both “feathering and flocking.”

# Empirical Validity of Social Learning Theories

Akers argues that social learning theory has received **strong** empirical support.

More variance (R squared value) explained in multivariate models testing SLT (31-68%) than other criminological theories such as social bonding theories (15%) and strain theories (5%).



# Policy Implications of SLT: Prevention and Treatment Programs

- If individuals learn criminal definitions, they should be able to learn non-criminal definitions.
- Behavioral modification programs designed to re-socialize individuals into “normal” lifestyle.
- Assessment of programs gives mixed evidence.

# Social Bonding and Control Theories

Part I: Early Control Theories

Part II: Social Bonding Theory

Part III: Self-Control Theory

# Assumptions of Control Theory

Assume all people are *equally* capable of committing crime and would do so if left to their own devices.

- Past Theories ask the Question: *Why do people break the law?*
- Social Control Theories ask the question: *Why don't people break the law?*

# Motivation vs. Control

- Both control theories and other theories ALL focus on crime and deviance.
- Control theories flip the question about why people conform to rules.
- Some theories stress why individuals are motivated to commit crimes (e.g., rational choice), whereas control theory focuses on what inhibits crime.

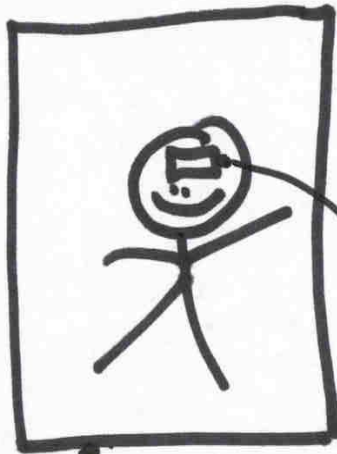
# Part I: Early Control Theories

Reiss and Nye (1950s)

- “Personal” Controls: internalized controls where people sanction themselves.
- “Social” Controls: legal and social sanctions external to individual.

# Containment Theory

- Push factors
- impulses
  - hostility
  - poverty
  - few opportunities



- Pull Factors
- bad companions
  - deviant subcultures



Inner Containment  
"Good Self-concept"

Outer containment  
parents, schools, strong group cohesion

# Neutralization and Drift

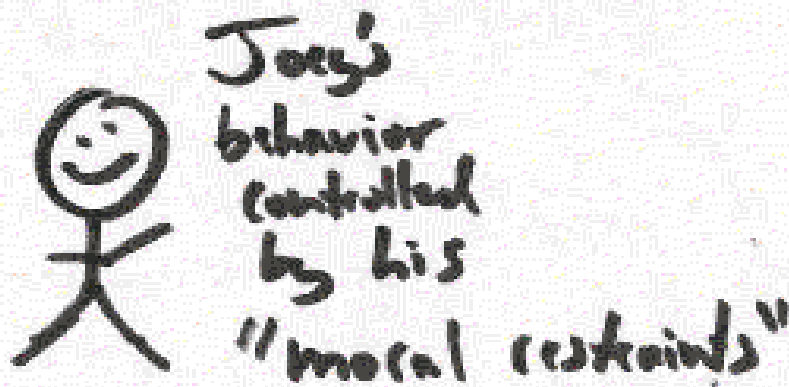
- Socially learned definitions neutralize moral views to justify crime.
- Categorized as a control theory: If conventional beliefs *control* deviance, then *neutralizing* those beliefs represents a weakening of social control.

# **Neutralizing Definitions:**

- 1. Denial of responsibility -- It's not my fault; I didn't have a choice**
- 2. Denial of injury -- It's no big deal; They have too much money**
- 3. Denial of victim -- They had it coming; They had a bad attitude**
- 4. Condemnation of the condemners -- Everybody does it; Why me?**
- 5. Appeal to higher loyalties -- Only cowards back down; protecting**



# Neutralization and Drift



Joe has  
an "episodic  
'release' from  
conventional  
moral  
restraints."  
Neutralizing  
Definitions

Time 1



Time 2

# Five-Finger Discount

Motives that underlie shoplifting behavior.

- “I wanted the item but didn’t want to pay”
- “Peer pressure”
- “I steal for a living”
- “I wanted the item and could not afford it”
- “I don’t know why, it was just an impulse”

# Part II: Hirchi's Social Bonding Theory (SBT)

- The most well known and tested control theory of crime.
- “deviant/criminal acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken”



In Hirchi's view, youths who are strongly attached to their parents are less likely to commit criminal acts. This family, which is celebrating the holiday Kwanzaa together, provides an environment that inhibits criminality.

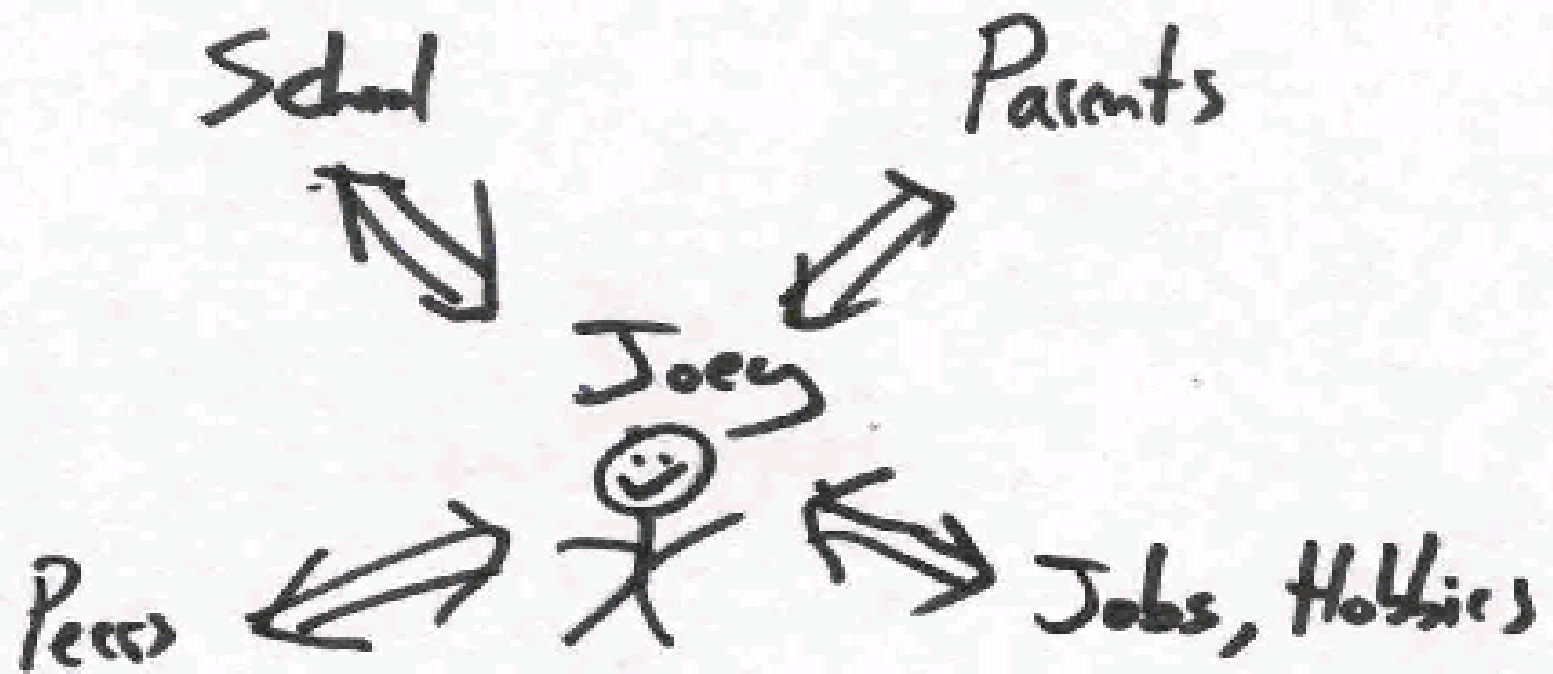
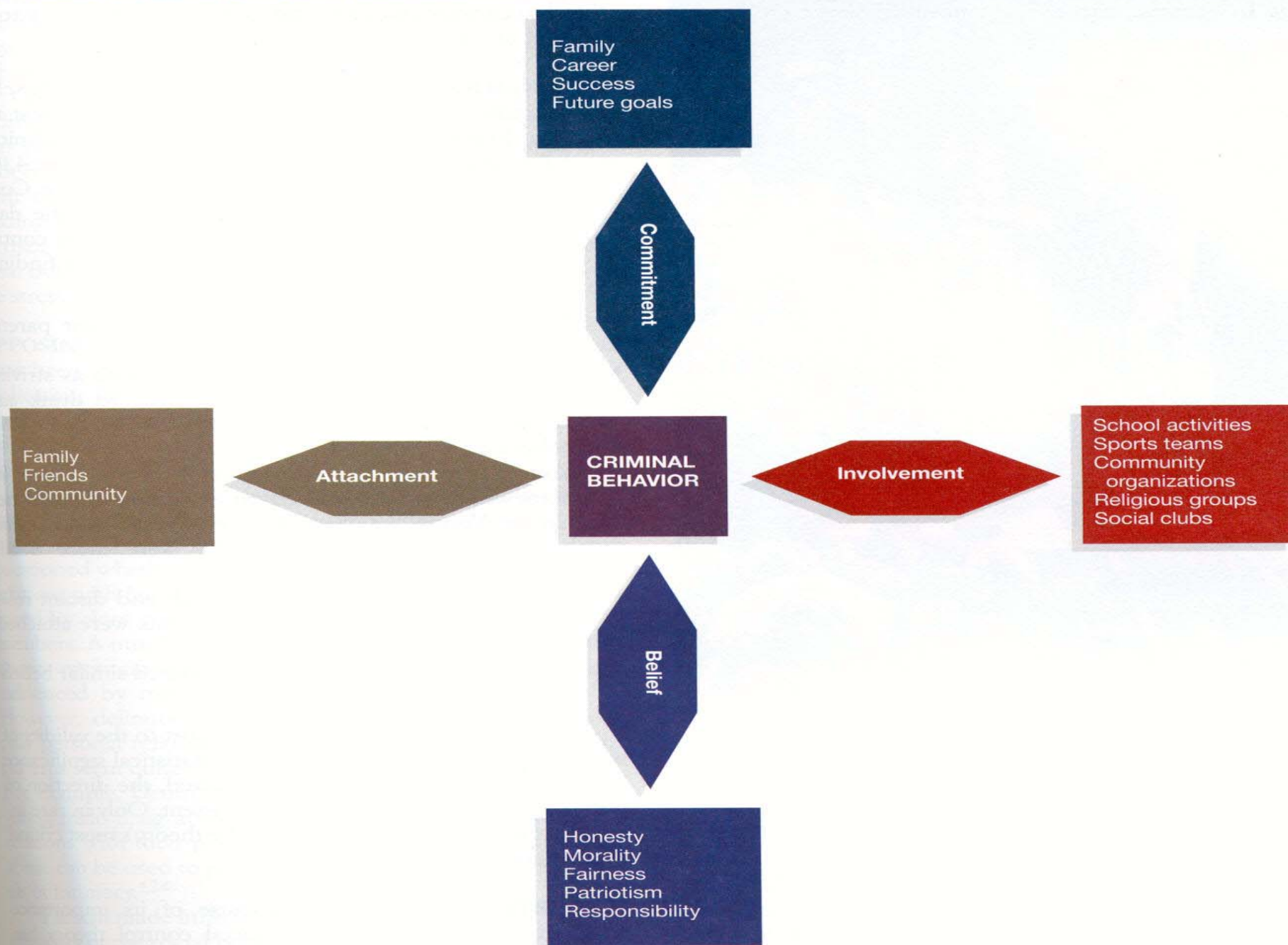


Figure 8.4 Elements of the social bond.



# 1.) Attachment to Others

- Self-control is best measured by the concept of attachment to avoid circular reasoning.
- Non-delinquents will have many rich ties with friends, family, and, institutions, whereas delinquents tend to have “cold and brittle” relationships with everyone.

## 2.) Commitment

- How much individuals have to gain from conformity to societal rules and to lose from deviance.
- Individuals who invest heavily in careers and education will not want to risk losing this investment.

### 3.) Involvement

- How often, and to what degree an individual engages in conventional activities such as studying, spending time with family, and other prosocial activities.
- One becomes too busy, too preoccupied, or too consumed to get involved in delinquent activities.



## 4.) Belief

- Endorsement of general conventional values and social norms, especially the belief that laws and societal rules are morally correct and should be obeyed.
- When these beliefs have been *weakened*, deviance is a likely result.

# Measures of Social Bonding Concepts

- Attachment: parental supervision, relationship with parents, teachers, friends.
- Commitment: smoking, drinking, and risky activities, as compared to investment in school and job goals.
- Involvement: Activities a person is involve with.
- Belief: Respect for law? Respect for social rules? Endorse neutralizing or conventional values?

# Empirical Validity SBT

- **Weak to modest empirical support.**
- Some studies including Hirchi's own find that association with delinquents (e.g., peers or family) increases delinquency. Thus, support for social learning theory

# Part III: Self-Control Theory

- Hirschi revises theory
- Individuals with **high self-control** will be “substantially less likely at all periods of life to engage in criminal acts.”
- Low self-control thought to be established early on in life as a result of incomplete or ineffective socialization. This research related to the psychological research concerning sociopaths and other types of “opportunists”

# Importance of Individual Socialization

- Impulsivity: act without reflecting upon consequences.
- Insensitivity: individuals miscalculate or devalue the pain of guilt
- Immediate gratification: individual not able or willing to wait for rewards that are delayed (e.g., getting a good job after 7 years of hard work in school).

Short  
Term  
Reward

**Do the Crime**

**Don't do the  
Crime**

Impulsiveness



The graph features a vertical y-axis and a horizontal x-axis. The y-axis is labeled 'Short Term Reward' at the top, and the x-axis is labeled 'Impulsiveness' at the bottom. A red line starts at a high point on the y-axis and slopes downward to the right. The region above this line is labeled 'Do the Crime', and the region below is labeled 'Don't do the Crime'. Both axes have arrowheads at their ends.

# Testability of Self-Control Theory

- **Tautology** or circular reasoning: Problem with measuring low self-control with measures of crime and delinquency.
- Three types of tests.

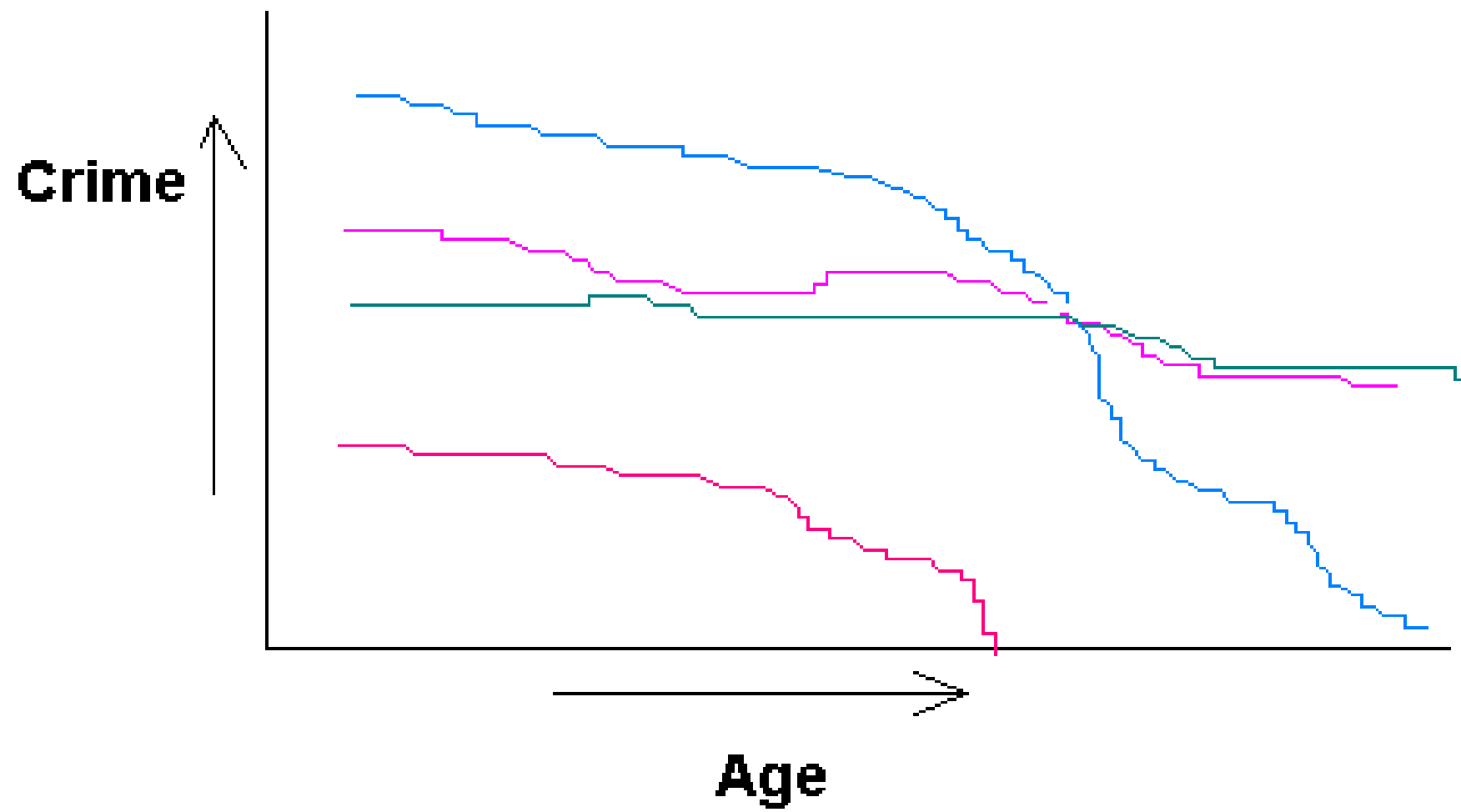
# Test 1: Correlating Different Types of Delinquency Measures

| <b>Independent Variable</b>             | <b>Dependent Variable</b>                   |
|---|---|
| Frequency of drinking                   | DUI arrests                                 |
| Smoking and drinking                    | Other measures of self-reported delinquency |
| All types of risky and deviant behavior | More serious criminal offenses              |
|   |   |



## Test 2: Life-Course and Stability of Deviance/Crime

- Hypothesis: Socialization of traits such as impulsiveness should remain stable through a person's life. Thus, an individual should not easily age out of crime.
- Findings: Some stability from childhood to adulthood, but likely explained by *changing social circumstances* rather than changing personality traits.



## Test 3: Predicting Self-Control with Individual Traits

- The problem circularity could be solved if specific traits are measured independent of crime and deviance measures, and are associated with criminality.

**Self-control traits:  
(Dependent  
Variable)**

**Shortsightedness,  
Inability to Profit, Poor  
Judgment, Miscalculation  
of Pain, Involvement in  
CRIME**

**Predictor traits:  
(Independent  
variable)**

**Adventuresome, Low  
IQ, High Activity  
Level, Physical  
Strength**

# Policy Implications

- Some positive findings by schools; implemented programs to increase bonding and learning between children and their parents and teachers can reduce delinquency.
- Self-control theories indicate the importance of early life experiences and socialization.
- Is it more effective to be proactive and reduce the causes of criminality, than to try to deter and incapacitate impulsive deviants once they “are created” ?