

behavior.¹⁸ Several studies have supported this perspective, although most of them have focused on the individual delinquent's lack of self-control and low self-concept, rather than the surrounding culture and economic system (Hay and Forrest, 2006; Boutwell and Beaver, 2010).

Some have noted that parental criminality contributes to low self-esteem and in turn high levels of delinquency (Higgins, 2009; Coleman, 2008). Parental involvement in various kinds of criminal behavior has consistently been correlated with delinquency. This has been especially underscored through longitudinal studies of delinquency (Wilson, 1975; Farrington et al., 1996; Dryfoos, 1990).

Social Learning Theory

According to this theory, people become delinquent or criminal through the same kind of process as learning to become anything else. One learns behavior as one learns values, beliefs, and attitudes, through one's association with other human beings. One of the earliest variations of this theory as it applies to delinquency was the theory of **differential association** originally developed by Edwin Sutherland (Sutherland and Cressey, 1970). According to this theory, one becomes a delinquent not only through contact with others who are delinquent but also through contact with various values, beliefs, and attitudes supportive of criminal/delinquent behavior in addition to the various techniques used to commit such acts. One of the central points of this theory is the proposition that one becomes a delinquent/criminal "because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable [to violation] of law" (Shoemaker, 1996: 152–153). In other words, a young person will become delinquent through his or her association with delinquent youths. Together they reinforce beliefs, values, and attitudes that lead to and perpetuate delinquency.

Social learning theory suggests that there are three related processes that lead one to become a delinquent or criminal: 1) acquisition, 2) instigation, and 3) maintenance (Goldstein, 1991: 55–61).

Acquisition refers to the original learning of behavior. The key to this process is that of reinforcement through the modeling influences of one's family, the immediate subculture (especially the peer subculture), and symbolic modeling (e.g., via television). In the case of learning aggression, a child who witnesses violence within the home is apt to engage in violence later in life. This is especially true if such violence within the home is rewarded or no sanctions are applied. Important here is the fact that children tend to acquire behaviors they observe in others and to see that these behaviors are rewarded.

Instigation refers to the process whereby once a person has acquired the behavior, certain factors work to cause or instigate a specific event—in this case, an act of delinquency. Learning theory suggests five key factors as major instigators:

- *Aversive events*—events characteristics such as frustration, relative deprivation, and, of particular importance in gang violence, verbal insults and actual assaults. For those who are especially violent, threats to one's reputation and status, especially those occurring in public, are very important instigators of violent acts.

- *Modeling influences*—actually observing delinquent or criminal behavior by someone who serves as a role model can be an immediate instigator.
- *Incentive inducements*—anticipated rewards. One can be motivated to commit a crime by some perceived reward, usually monetary.
- *Instructional control*—following orders from someone in authority. A gang member, for example, may obey a direct order from a leader within the gang.
- *Environmental control*—factors in one's immediate environment, which include crowded conditions (including traffic), extreme heat, pollution, and noise.

Each of these can cause someone to "lose it" and act out, sometimes in a violent manner.¹⁹ For delinquent or criminal behavior to persist, there needs to be consistent **reinforcement** or **maintenance**. Social learning theory suggests four specific kinds of reinforcement:

- *Direct reinforcement* refers to extrinsic rewards that correspond to an act (e.g., money or recognition).
- *Vicarious reinforcement* includes seeing others get rewards and/or escape punishment for delinquent or criminal acts (e.g., a youth sees someone carrying a lot of money obtained by selling drugs).
- *Self-reinforcement* simply means that a person derives his self-worth or sense of pride as a result of criminal acts.
- *Neutralization of self-punishment* is the process whereby one justifies or rationalizes delinquent acts.

Concerning the last method of reinforcement, one long-standing sociological theory is commonly referred to as *techniques of neutralization* (Sykes and Matza, 1957). The authors of this perspective suggest that delinquents often come up with rationalizations or excuses that absolve them of guilt. Thus, for example, a youth may say that no one was harmed or that the victim deserved it ("He had it coming to him"), or he may condemn those who condemn him (e.g., by saying that adults do these kinds of things, too), appeal to higher loyalties (e.g., "I'm doing it for the 'hood'"), or merely put the blame on various external factors. An important aspect of such techniques of neutralization is that during the process, the victim is dehumanized, and there is a gradual desensitization regarding the use of violence or other means of force to get one's way.

Gangs And Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs Consistent with social learning theories is the view that humans pass through various stages in their lives. Relatedly, this view suggests that human problems do not emerge overnight, seemingly out of nowhere. Rather, life is a process, and humans go through life developmentally, through various stages of growth. There are numerous theories relating this process to human growth and fulfillment (e.g., those of Freud, Piaget, and Erikson), but space does not permit a complete summary of these