• As well as offering an account of how crime may spread through specific social groups and in communities, Sutherland’s theory can also account for why so many offenders reoffend after leaving prison.

• You can assume that offenders learn new techniques from more experienced offenders whilst on the inside and want to try them out when released.

• This learning may occur through observational learning and imitation (social learning theory) or direct tuition from criminal peers.

Evaluation: Explanatory power

• One of the strengths of this theory is its ability to account for crime within all sectors of society.

• Whilst Sutherland recognised that some types of crime, e.g. burglary, may be clustered in certain working-class communities, it is also the case that some crimes are more dominant in more affluent groups.

• Sutherland was interested in white-collar crimes and how this may be a feature of middle-class social groups who share deviant norms and values.

Evaluation: Shift of Focus

• Sutherland was successful in moving the emphasis away from biological explanations for crime, and away from those that explained offending as being the product of weakness or immorality.

• This theory draws attention to the fact that dysfunctional social circumstances and environments may be more to blame than dysfunctional people.

• This approach is more desirable because it offers a more realistic solution to the problem instead of eugenics (biological solution) or punishment (morality solution).

Evaluation: Difficulty of testing

• Differential association theory suffers from being difficult to test. For example, it is hard to see how the number of pro-criminal attitudes someone has, or has been exposed to, could be measured.