

PART V

Varieties of Control Theory

Sociological explanations of crime have been dominated by three main traditions: differential association/learning theory, anomie/strain theory, and control theory. Other theories have been set forth, but usually they have either integrated concepts from, or have been developed explicitly to challenge, these three dominant traditions. The enduring appeal of these traditions is in part due to the elegant way in which original statements of the theories conveyed powerful theses as to the origins of criminal conduct. Indeed, each perspective was authored by a scholar of enormous accomplishment: anomie/strain theory by Robert K. Merton; differential association theory by Edwin Sutherland; and control theory by Travis Hirschi.

Hirschi was not the first control theorist. As noted previously, Shaw and McKay (Chapter 3) tied delinquency to the attenuation of control in inner-city areas. Other theorists focused on how types of control—usually differentiating between those inside individuals (e.g., conscience) and those outside individuals (e.g., parental reactions)—were related to wayward behavior. For example, Reiss (1951) delineated “personal and social controls,” and Nye (1958) emphasized controls that were “internal,” “direct,” and “indirect.” Sykes and Matza (Chapter 13 in this part) also are seen as control theorists, because they examined how people become free to commit crime only when beliefs can be evoked to “neutralize” the restraint normative standards usually exert over them. Furthermore, Walter Reckless (1961) advanced the “containment theory” perspective

that anticipated many of the ideas that Hirschi would later formalize (for an overview of control theory, see Britt and Costello, 2015).

Despite these predecessors, it was Hirschi’s “social bond theory,” published in *Causes of Delinquency* (1969), that emerged as the preeminent statement of control theory (Chapter 14 in this part). In this work, Hirschi divided criminological theory into three main perspectives, which he identified by the terms “control theory,” “strain theory,” and “cultural deviance theory”—a term he used for differential association/learning approaches (see also Kornhauser, 1978). He argued that these three perspectives were incompatible, and that they should be seen as rivals to be tested empirically against one another. Thus, in *Causes of Delinquency*, Hirschi not only set forth his social bond theory but also presented data showing the merits of his perspective and the comparative weaknesses of strain and cultural deviance perspectives.

Up until this time, most theoretical statements were just that—essays proposing a plausible explanation of crime. Hirschi, however, “upped the ante” by showing that theories could be tested and by claiming that empirical evidence should be the arbiter of which perspective deserved allegiance. In particular, Hirschi revealed the utility of using survey research to test theories. In this method, respondents—usually juveniles in a high school—would be given a questionnaire that contained *both* measures of theoretical concepts and a “self-report” scale of delinquency. In this way, it would be possible to see which theory,

as operationalized by the measures on the questionnaire, could explain more or less involvement in delinquency. It is noteworthy that this approach is the chief way in which criminologists test micro-level theories of crime.

We will turn shortly to Hirschi's social bond theory. As a prelude, however, we will focus on perhaps his two most important theoretical predecessors: first, techniques of neutralization theory by Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza (1957 [Chapter 13 in this part]) and, second, containment theory by Walter C. Reckless (1961).

Techniques of Neutralization

Sykes and Matza's delinquency theory represents both the embrace of and departure from Sutherland's differential association perspective (see Chapter 6 in Part III). Sutherland had proposed that individuals enter crime because they learn definitions favorable to violation of the law. He was largely silent, however, on the content of these definitions. Building on Sutherland, Sykes and Matza provide insight on what specific definitions or beliefs might encourage offending. They delineate a core set of beliefs—which they label “techniques of neutralization”—that they argue are learned and permit law-breaking to take place. Unlike Sutherland, however, they do not see most offenders as becoming so enmeshed in a criminal value system as to reject the norms of the larger conventional society. Thus, they criticize in particular subcultural theories, such as the one proposed by Cohen (1955 [Chapter 10]), that portray youngsters as learning a value system that celebrates crime and opposes prosocial normative standards. In these subcultures, conventional society is stood on its head. “Conformity” entails following antisocial values and breaking the law without guilt or remorse.

Most youths, observe Sykes and Matza, cannot escape the powerful socializing influences of conventional society. Subcultural members are the rare exception, not the rule. Parents, teachers, ministers, and criminal justice officials provide

a unified message that crime is wrong and that youngsters should obey the law. Under normal circumstances, therefore, children come to internalize and believe in the morality of the dominant normative system. Thoughts of violating normative standards evoke feelings of guilt and shame. Individuals know and respect right from wrong. As a result, they are controlled by their conventional beliefs.

But if this is so, how is it possible—as Sykes and Matza put it—that people violate laws that they believe in? Sykes and Matza's contribution is in developing a *theory of how controls are neutralized*. They argue that there are sets of beliefs that, when invoked, in effect say that it is “okay” to commit a criminal act “in this circumstance.” They group these crime-justifying beliefs into five categories, which they call “techniques of neutralization.”

To give but one example, many college students illegally download music and computer programs. These same students would never even think to pilfer a fellow student's books, cell phone, or purse, for this would be “stealing” and clearly morally wrong. After all, they are not “thieves.” But appropriating music and software incurs little guilt or shame because it can be justified by explaining that such conduct “does not hurt anyone.” This technique, which neutralizes normative controls, is what Sykes and Matza call “denial of injury.” Another neutralizing justification might be that music and computer companies are monopolistic and charge excessively high prices. They are unfair and deserve to have their property taken. Sykes and Matza would term this “denial of the victim.” There is, in fact, some evidence that these types of beliefs identified by Sykes and Matza do facilitate criminal involvement not only for juveniles but also for adults (Benson, 1985 [Chapter 27 in Part IX]; Maruna and Copes, 2005).

In a way, Sykes and Matza bridge differential association and control theories. Similar to the Sutherland tradition, they argue that learned beliefs or definitions lead to crime. But

similar to control theory, they do not see a society wracked by culture conflict. Rather, in their theoretical world, there is a dominant normative system about which there is consensus and into which virtually everyone is socialized. Again, this means that controls are present over most of us most of the time. The theoretical task is to explain why, under certain circumstances, individuals are able to ignore the very normative standards that they typically believe and that typically control them. For Sykes and Matza, techniques of neutralization comprise the solution to this criminological puzzle.

Matza (1964) subsequently expanded these ideas in his classic book *Delinquency and Drift*. At the core of this effort was an attempt to normalize delinquents—to show that they were not so different from so-called conventional youngsters. He did so in two ways.

First, in Chapter 38, we will review Terrie Moffitt's (1993) theory in which she distinguishes between two types of antisocial youths. As the label implies, "adolescent-limited" offenders are those who confine their delinquency to the teenage years. Most antisocial teenagers follow this path of development, and, in this sense, it can be considered normal. "Life-course-persistent" offenders are those who start to manifest conduct problems early in life, become serious delinquents, and persist in their criminality well into adulthood. This second group is small in size and is ensnared in a problematic developmental pathway. For the most part, Matza was theorizing about the typical delinquent whose delinquent acts were limited to adolescence. He made much of what he called "maturational reform," noting that the majority of wayward youths do not become adult criminals. He criticized other theories, especially subcultural perspectives that depicted delinquents as fully embracing a criminal culture. Matza (1964: 21–22) said that such approaches suffered from an "embarrassment of riches" in the sense that they attributed too much criminality to their subjects. By seeing offenders as different and as constrained to break the law, they could not explain why the

typical delinquent would ever stop offending and become a conventional adult.

Second, Matza (1964) proposed that youths were not constantly preoccupied with crime and driven to break the law. He noted that despite having ubiquitous opportunities to offend, for most youths "delinquency fails to occur during all but a tiny proportion of those moments" (1964: 69). Most often, they are "distracted and restrained by convention from the commission of offenses" (p. 69). Only "episodically" are they "released from the moral bind of conventional order" (p. 69). One way this release occurs, of course, is by using techniques of neutralization (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

In a key contention, Matza asserted that "during release the delinquent is not constrained to commit offense; rather he is free to drift into delinquency" (1964: 69). The concept of "drift" is Matza's main theoretical contribution. Rejecting the image of the constrained, driven delinquent, he noted that "drift stands midway between freedom and control" (p. 28). A delinquent act is influenced by factors such as having committed crimes in the past ("preparation") and a fatalistic sense that an act must be carried out ("desperation"). But a delinquent act is also chosen, a reflection of a youth's "will" to offend. "Will, by definition, is something that may or may not be exercised," observed Matza. "Will is an option" (p. 191). In contemporary criminology, Matza's focus on the subjective decision to act is called "human agency," and it represents an important line of inquiry (see, e.g., Laub and Sampson, 2003 [Chapter 39]; Paternoster and Bushway, 2009 [Chapter 40]). More broadly, as a classic contribution, Matza's *Delinquency and Drift* contains many theoretical insights that remain relevant today (see Blomberg et al., 2018).

Containment Theory

Twentieth-century sociological criminology was largely dominated by the "Big Three" theories: strain, differential association (also called

“cultural deviance” or “social learning”), and control. As noted above, Travis Hirschi clearly demarcated these three perspectives and called for a rigorous empirical competition to see which theory would still be standing after all the data were counted.

Walter Reckless was equally perceptive about the need to “make sense” of the prevailing theoretical paradigms so as to show how his “containment theory” differed. His terminology proved to be less compelling than Hirschi’s characterization of competing frameworks; still, he offered a similar understanding of alternative theories and of what was distinctive and important about his brand of control theory.

Thus, Reckless identified two categories of theories that were popular in his day: “push” theories and “pull” theories. When answering why people committed criminal acts, push theories demarcated forces that would “push” or propel individuals onto the other side of the law. Strain theories fell into this category (see Part IV). Reckless also believed that Bonger’s depiction of the way capitalism creates intense pressures toward crime would qualify as a push theory (see Chapter 19 in this volume). In contrast, pull theories showed how people could be lured into crime by providing antisocial models and criminal companions. Differential association or social learning theories would fall into this rubric (see Part III). Reckless also made room for pushes toward crime that emerge from deeply within the individual. Although this line of analysis was not well developed, he argued that pushes could be “psychologic or organic in origin” and include

... extreme restlessness and discontent, marked inner tensions, hostility, aggressiveness, aggrandizement and need for immediate gratification, extreme suggestibility, rebellion against authority, sibling rivalry, hypersensitivity, strong feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, guilt reactions, mental conflicts, anxieties, compulsions, phobias, organic impairments (brain damage, epilepsy, and so on). (Reckless, 1961: 356)

In making these observations, he recognized that individual traits could be implicated in crime causation (see Parts I, XII, and XIII in this volume).

Reckless believed, however, that “push” and “pull” theories were incomplete. His main criticism was that they assumed that there was an ineluctable relationship between a strong push or pull and participating in crime. To be sure, Reckless was schooled at the University of Chicago and was intellectually partial to Shaw and McKay’s (Chapter 3) perspective on crime. He agreed that social disorganization was an important source of wayward conduct—a point we will return to shortly. Reckless had an insight, however, that escaped others: What about the “good boy” in the “bad areas”? In disorganized inner-city neighborhoods, many boys (and girls) did not succumb to the criminogenic pushes and pulls that surrounded them. How did they *resist* these criminal influences? What made them different from the boys (and girls) who were propelled or lured into crime? In a series of empirical studies, Reckless proposed that a “good self-concept” *insulated* these boys from the “bad neighborhoods” in which they resided (see Reckless et al., 1957; see also Scarpitti, 2002). But self-concept was only one factor that played a role in insulating against crime and in controlling wayward impulses. A more comprehensive “containment theory” was needed to capture Reckless’s (1961) thoughts on this matter. Indeed, a major advantage of Reckless’s theory was that its scope included internal and external sources of control. Notably, subsequent control theories would tend to emphasize the importance of one or the other of these dimensions.

Reckless grouped one important set of controls under the category of “outer containment.” To a large extent, this insight arose from his witnessing the disorganization that prevailed in Chicago during his graduate school days. But Reckless had another source for his insight: anthropology (see 1961: 337–340). At one point, he had considered a scholarly career in archaeology and had traveled to the Middle East. During this

venture, he was struck by how “contained” these societies were—how unlike they were from the more socially open United States—and thus how little crime was experienced (personal interview with F. Cullen, 1980). In any event, for Reckless, outer containment is substantially the opposite of social disorganization. It occurs when individuals are enmeshed in “effective family life and an effective supporting structure in the neighborhood and the larger society” (1961: 352).

Again, however, Reckless realized that outer containment was often weak or not sufficiently strong to control the strong pulls and pushes individuals might experience. In such cases, the crucial last line of defense was whether a person had developed “inner containment.” Reckless (1961: 355) included a lengthy roster of components within this construct:

...inner containment consists of good self-control, ego strength, well developed superego (conscience), good self-concept, high resistance to diversions, high frustration tolerance, high sense of responsibility, goal orientation, ability to find substitute satisfactions, tension-reducing rationalizations, and so on.

In the end, Reckless’s multidimensional concept of inner containment may have proved too detailed and too difficult to measure. Indeed, it is instructive that his own empirical research focused only on the “self-concept as an insulator.” Scientific paradigms, including criminological theories, earn support not only based on their potential accuracy but also based on whether they are stated in a parsimonious way such that they can be easily understood and tested. Travis Hirschi’s “social bond theory” would have these characteristics. He would clearly specify four social bonds (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief) and then show how these bonds could be measured and tested against competing theories. Combined with its intellectual rigor, the parsimony and testability of his perspective would contribute to social bond theory playing a major role in American criminology to this day.

Social Bond Theory

Although often unstated, most theories of crime make assumptions about human nature and its potential influence on behavior. For strain and cultural deviance theories, humans are usually considered to be “blank slates” onto which society writes its script for the person’s life. On occasion, scholars in these traditions will admit that humans have innate or universal drives, but they do not see these forces as inherently criminogenic. Take, for example, the ninth proposition of Sutherland’s differential association theory (see Chapter 6), which states that “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” (Sutherland and Cressey, 1970: 76).

Once they have rejected the notion that humans are driven to break the law because of their “nature,” strain and cultural deviance theorists must address the question: “Well, then, why do people commit crimes?” The theoretical challenge is to discern what social conditions *motivate* individuals to engage in illegal acts. For strain theory, the motivation is rooted in negative social relations and experiences that expose people to strain; crime is a way of relieving or otherwise responding to this strain. For cultural deviance or learning theories, the motivation is created by social relations or experiences in which individuals learn to positively value crime, at least under some circumstances. Just as youths learn to like going to baseball games, they can learn to like breaking windows, shoplifting from stores, and beating up others.

As Hirschi notes, control theorists start out with a different premise about human nature: people will “naturally” break the law. It is not necessary to show that humans have an “id,” as psychoanalytic theory would suggest, or that they have unique “animal impulses” or are innately aggressive, as some biological theories contend. Rather, for control theorists, it is sufficient to

observe that like other animals, humans seek gratification and that crime is often an easy means to secure such gratification (see also Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). People may vary in their need for gratification, but humans generally have enough desire to seek pleasure that they have ample motivation to commit crimes on a regular basis.

This assumption has important theoretical implications (Costello, 2013). If all humans have motivations for crime, then theories that set forth special explanations of criminal motivation—such as strain and cultural deviance theories—are not needed. They are explaining something that does not need explaining; they are addressing the wrong question. Thus, rather than asking, “Why do they do it?,” criminologists should be asking, “Why don’t they do it?” (Hirschi, 1969: 34). That is, if humans’ natural pursuit of gratification makes crime attractive, what is it that stops them from acting on this impulse?

The answer, of course, is the *control* that society exerts over individuals. According to Hirschi (1969: 16), “control theories assume that delinquent acts result when an individual’s bond to society is weak or broken.” It follows that *variation in control*, not variation in motivation, explains why some people break the law more than others. The theoretical task thus is to uncover the nature of social control and how it constrains people from acting out their underlying wayward urges.

In *Causes of Delinquency* (1969), Hirschi set forth what remains, even to this day, the most influential variant of control theory, which he called “social bond” theory (see the selection in Chapter 14). This perspective is distinctly sociological, because Hirschi focused not on internal controls, such as a superego or inner containment, but rather on how an individual’s *bond to society* influences decisions to break the law. He did not deny that internal controls exist—individual conduct is affected by what people think and anticipate will happen to them—but ultimately these controls originate with and are sustained by the person’s bond to society.

Hirschi’s theoretical genius is seen in his willingness to move beyond the general proposition that weak controls cause crime to specifying the four major elements of the social bond: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. In essence, Hirschi argued that delinquency would be low among youngsters who are attached to and care about the opinions of others—especially their parents, whose commitment to school gives them a strong investment in conformity that they do not wish to risk by getting into trouble, who are involved in conventional activities that occupy their time, and who believe they should obey rules. In contrast, youths who are not close to their parents, have few prospects for a successful future, are idle after school hours, and have no allegiance to conventional morality are prime candidates for delinquency.

Self-Control Theory

Two decades after the publication of *Causes of Delinquency*, Travis Hirschi joined with Michael Gottfredson to author *A General Theory of Crime* (1990), a volume in which he set forth the premise that a lack of “self-control” was the chief source of criminal behavior (see Chapter 15 in this part). In this book, Gottfredson and Hirschi did not explicitly try to reconcile social bond and self-control theories. It is clear, however, that Hirschi’s thinking about crime had changed over time and that his latest work was a marked departure from his earlier theorizing. In particular, whereas Hirschi’s social bond theory located control in a person’s *relation to society*, self-control theory moved the locus of control *inside the individual*. To a large extent, Hirschi now saw crime as rooted not in social experiences but in individual differences that developed early in life and had effects across the life course (see Parts XII and XIII).

Gottfredson and Hirschi embraced the view that criminal behavior is gratifying; indeed, they observed that crime is an easy source of short-term pleasure because committing a crime requires few skills and opportunities to offend are

readily available. Why, then, would people bypass the chance to gain easy gratification through crime? Why don't they do it? The answer to this classic control theory question, as in *Causes of Delinquency*, is that controls hold these impulses in check, but unlike before, Gottfredson and Hirschi asserted that self-control, not social bonds, is the chief source of resistance against criminal temptations.

Social bond theory was largely an explanation of *juvenile* delinquency, focusing on how adolescents attach to parents, commit to school, are involved in recreational activities, and the like. By 1990, however, research had revealed that many wayward youths do not suddenly become seriously delinquent in their teen years. Instead, they begin to manifest conduct problems in childhood—problems that evolve into delinquency (see Moffitt, 1993 [Chapter 38]; Patterson et al., 1989). This continuity or stability in misconduct suggests that the roots of crime lie not in adolescence but in the first years of life. It would follow, of course, that criminologists should search for the causes of crime in childhood and not, as had previously been the case, in the experiences of juveniles in the teenage years.

The critical social milieu in childhood is the family, and the critical experiences children encounter are intimately shaped by their parents. What, then, distinguishes the children who can resist seeking immediate gratification from those who act on their impulses, engaging in such precursors of delinquency as stealing, bullying, and lying? For Gottfredson and Hirschi, the key differentiating factor is whether a child can exercise “self-control.” They reject the idea that this self-control is caused by biological predispositions (see, however, Wright and Beaver, 2005). Instead, here they remain sociologists in attributing the inculcation of self-control to how parents raise their children. In particular, they assert that parents who monitor their children, recognize deviant behavior when it occurs, and then correct this conduct will instill self-control. Conversely, say Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 97), “the major

‘cause’ of low self-control thus appears to be ineffective child-rearing” (for an assessment of this parenting thesis, see Cullen et al., 2008; Hay and Meldrum, 2016).

Gottfredson and Hirschi contend that the level of self-control, once established in childhood, is an enduring propensity or individual difference that has *general* effects in a person's life. This explains why there is stability of offending across the life course. The continuing lack of self-control also explains why criminal offenders also engage in activities that are “analogous” to crime—that is, acts, such as smoking, drinking, skipping school, having unprotected sex, and driving fast, which, like crime, provide easy and immediate gratification. As Gottfredson and Hirschi note, traditional sociological theories of crime have not shown that they can account for these key empirical facts: the early emergence of conduct problems, the stability of offending, and the participation of criminals in wide-ranging forms of deviance.

Notably, since its publication in 1990, Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory has been subjected to extensive conceptual analysis and empirical investigation (see Goode, 2008). Thus, scholars have shown that the concept of self-control has various dimensions. According to Tittle et al. (2004), individuals not only vary in the *capacity* for self-control—as Gottfredson and Hirschi argue—but also in their *desire* to exercise control. In this vein, Muravan et al. (2006) suggest that self-control is not stable in a situation—again as Gottfredson and Hirschi argue—but can experience *depletion* if, similar to a muscle that loses strength, it is overused in a short period of time. It is further relevant that some of the bolder claims of the theory have not been supported, such as the contention that social learning variables (e.g., antisocial values) are unrelated to crime. Even so, there is now extensive evidence linking self-control to crime and “analogous behaviors” across social groups (e.g., gender and age) and across cultures (Gottfredson, 2006; Hay and Meldrum, 2016; Pratt and Cullen, 2000; Vazsonyi et al., 2017).

Social Bonds Across the Life Course

Although they share certain features because they are both control theories, self-control theory and social bond theory are incompatible in fundamental ways (cf. Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1995, with Sampson and Laub, 1995; see also Pratt, 2016). Social bond theory asserts that experiences beyond childhood can affect a person's ties to conventional society, and thus that as bonds strengthen or weaken, people's involvement in crime can ebb and flow. In contrast, self-control theory contends that criminal propensities are established in childhood, and thus that misconduct is stable across the life course. Even more provocatively, self-control theory claims that any apparent empirical relationship between social bonds (e.g., attachment to others, commitment to schooling) and crime is spurious. Self-control would account for both the bond and the level of crime. Thus, if being in a good marriage is associated with less crime, Gottfredson and Hirschi would argue that this is because people with high levels of self-control are both more likely to have good marriages and less likely to engage in crime.

Ironically, social bond theory received its most potent shot in the arm from two former students of Gottfredson and Hirschi, Robert Sampson and John Laub (1993). Sampson and Laub agree with their mentors that sociological theorists have largely neglected the "considerable evidence that antisocial behavior is relatively stable across stages of the life course" (1993: 11). But they take Gottfredson and Hirschi to task for committing what Elliott Currie (1985: 185) calls the "fallacy of intractability—the belief that because childhood problems often appear early in life they are therefore fundamentally irreversible, portents of criminality worsening into adulthood." While there is continuity in antisocial behavior, observe Sampson and Laub, there is also *change*. Some problem children grow up to be delinquents, but others do not; some delinquents become adult criminals, but others do not; some adult criminals persist in their offending, but others do not.

Individual difference theories, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory, are adept at explaining *continuity* in problem behavior. Once equipped with an enduring criminal propensity, people carry this trait from situation to situation and from one age to the next. These theories encounter difficulty, however, in explaining *change* in behavior. If, for example, a person has low self-control, why would he or she ever stop being criminal? Or why would a juvenile who had no record of childhood misconduct—and thus whose parents instilled self-control—start getting into trouble in the teenage years (see Moffitt, Chapter 38)?

Using a life-course perspective, Sampson and Laub suggest that people usually are on certain "trajectories" that result in continuity of behavior. Even so, people also experience "transitions," life events that may serve as "turning points" that evoke behavioral change. Sampson and Laub propose that establishing *social bonds*, such as through schooling or marriage, is a salient reason why people are redirected away from crime and into conformity. Explaining change, in short, requires a consideration of sociological factors.

Although borrowing from Hirschi's social bond theory, Sampson and Laub do not simply rehash this perspective. First, while Hirschi focused on the juvenile years, Sampson and Laub examine the entire life course, from childhood to adulthood. Second, they develop an integrated theoretical perspective, accepting that individual differences and social bonds combine to explain the onset of and desistance from criminal behavior. Third, they argue that the key issue is not whether a social bond exists but whether the bond is of high *quality*. Quality relationships—such as a good marriage or a rewarding job—engender close attachment, growing commitment, and reciprocity. In turn, note Sampson and Laub (1993: 141), "relations characterized by an extensive set of obligations, expectations, and interdependent social networks are better able to facilitate social control."

As discussed above, Sampson and Laub merged social bond theory with the notion that crime should be studied as a developmental process that occurs across the life course. Their contribution is thus two-fold. First, they elaborate social bond theory and show its relevance not only to crime in adolescence but also to crime in adulthood. Importantly, their theory argues that informal social controls are *age-graded*, with different types of bonds affecting individuals at different stages in life (e.g., bonds to parents in childhood, to school in adolescence, to work in adulthood). The evidence is largely consistent with their theoretical predictions (Laub et al., 2006).

However, recent research suggests that in adulthood, desisting from crime may often precede rather than be the consequence of the formation of social bonds (Skardhamar and Savolainen, 2014; Skardhamar et al., 2015). That is, offenders may have to give up criminal endeavors before they will be capable of building

a quality marriage and retaining a good job—a causal order opposite of what Sampson and Laub (1993) propose. Of course, it also is possible that desistance and social bonds have a reciprocal relationship, with each affecting the other as the process of leaving a life in crime unfolds.

Second, they furnish one of the most important *life-course theories of crime*, a model that accounts for both continuity and change across time. For this reason, although we have discussed Sampson and Laub's perspective with regard to social bond theory here, their work is relevant to Part XIII, where perspectives that explore "Getting Into and Out of Crime: Life-Course Theories" are discussed. In this section, we review their more recent theoretical views (Laub and Sampson, 2003 [Chapter 39]). At that later juncture, we will also have more to say about how Sampson and Laub's ideas converge with and differ from competing life-course theories of crime, including Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control approach.

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13. Techniques of Neutralization

Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza

Sykes and Matza, like Sutherland, feel that criminal behavior is learned. And like Sutherland, they feel that part of that learning involves "motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes favorable to violation of law." They state, however, that the specific content of these rationalizations and attitudes has not received much attention. When they wrote their article in 1957, the dominant view was that delinquents held values that were the opposite of middle-class values. Delinquents in particular were said to generally approve of acts such as theft and fighting. This position, represented in the work of Albert Cohen (see Chapter 10 in Part IV), is attacked by Sykes and Matza (see also Matza, 1964).

The first part of their article presents evidence suggesting that delinquents do not generally approve of delinquency. The second part of their article presents an alternative formulation, in which they contend that delinquents are able to engage in delinquency by employing certain "techniques of neutralization." Although delinquents believe that delinquency is generally bad, they claim that their delinquent acts are justified for any one of several reasons (e.g., the victim had it coming, they didn't really hurt anybody). These justifications are said to be used before the delinquent act and to make the delinquent act possible by neutralizing the individual's belief that it is bad.

Because Sykes and Matza believe that these justifications for crime are learned, they are sometimes defined as "learning" theorists in the

Sutherland tradition (see Part III). In a fundamental way, however, their perspective is a control theory. Thus, Sykes and Matza do not see offenders as members of delinquent subcultures immune from the larger society's normative mandates. Rather, youngsters are socialized to hold conventional or prosocial beliefs that would typically prevent them from breaking the law. It is only when these normative controls are neutralized that individuals are able to commit specific criminal acts under specific circumstances. In short, techniques of neutralization are the mechanisms that people use to escape society's controls and feel free to engage in crime.

Data provide some support for neutralization theory. Much evidence suggests that offenders commonly justify or excuse their crimes using the neutralizations described by Sykes and Matza, as well as additional neutralizations identified by others (see Maruna and Copes, 2005). This is true of rapists (Scully and Marolla, 1984), white-collar criminals (Benson, 1985 [Chapter 27]), and others. Further, studies indicate that individuals differ in the extent to which they accept the neutralizations. Those individuals who accept more neutralizations usually engage in more crime. Some argue that this is because offenders use neutralizations to justify or excuse their crimes after the fact, but a few studies using longitudinal data have found that individuals who accept more neutralizations engage in more subsequent crime (see

Agnew, 1994). Studies also suggest that the effect of neutralizations on crime is influenced by several factors (see Agnew, 1994). Neutralizations, for example, are more likely to lead to crime among individuals who associate with delinquent peers. Such findings reflect the fact that neutralizations do not so much cause crime as make it easier for motivated individuals to engage in crime (by reducing their guilt).

The data, then, do suggest that the techniques of neutralization may well be a "crucial component" of Sutherland's "definitions favorable to violation of law." Maruna and Copes (2005) provide an excellent overview of the research on neutralization theory and provide several suggestions for further research. For example, they suggest that some neutralizations may be more likely than others to foster crime.

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In attempting to uncover the roots of juvenile delinquency, the social scientist has long since ceased to search for devils in the mind or stigma of the body. It is now largely agreed that delinquent behavior, like most social behavior, is learned and that it is learned in the process of social interaction.

The classic statement of this position is found in Sutherland's theory of differential association, which asserts that criminal or delinquent behavior involves the learning of (a) techniques of committing crimes and (b) motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes favorable to the violation of law. Unfortunately, the specific content of what is learned—as opposed to the process by which it is learned—has received relatively little attention in either theory or research. Perhaps the single strongest school of thought on the nature of this content has centered on the idea of a delinquent sub-culture. The basic characteristic of the delinquent subculture, it is argued, is a system of values that represents an inversion of the values held by respectable, law-abiding society. The world of the delinquent is the world of the law-abiding turned upside down and its norms constitute a countervailing force directed against the conforming social order. Cohen sees the process of developing a delinquent sub-culture as a matter of building, maintaining, and reinforcing a code for behavior which exists by opposition, which stands in point by point contradiction to dominant values, particularly those of the middle class. Cohen's portrayal of delinquency is executed with a good deal of sophistication, and he carefully avoids overly simple explanations such as those based on the principle of "follow the leader" or easy generalizations about "emotional disturbances." Furthermore, he does not accept the delinquent sub-culture as something given, but instead systematically examines the function of delinquent values as a viable solution to the lower-class, male child's problems in the area of social status. Yet in spite of its virtues, this image of juvenile delinquency as a form of behavior based on competing or countervailing values and norms appears to suffer from a number of serious defects. It is the nature of these defects and a possible alternative or modified explanation for a large portion of juvenile delinquency with which this paper is concerned.

The difficulties in viewing delinquent behavior as springing from a set of deviant values and

norms—as arising, that is to say, from a situation in which the delinquent defines his delinquency as “right”—are both empirical and theoretical. In the first place, if there existed in fact a delinquent sub-culture such that the delinquent viewed his illegal behavior as morally correct, we could reasonably suppose that he would exhibit no feelings of guilt or shame at detection or confinement. Instead, the major reaction would tend in the direction of indignation or a sense of martyrdom. It is true that some delinquents do react in the latter fashion, although the sense of martyrdom often seems to be based on the fact that others “get away with it” and indignation appears to be directed against the chance events or lack of skill that led to apprehension. More important, however, is the fact that there is a good deal of evidence suggesting that many delinquents *do* experience a sense of guilt or shame, and its outward expression is not to be dismissed as a purely manipulative gesture to appease those in authority. Much of this evidence is, to be sure, of a clinical nature or in the form of impressionistic judgments of those who must deal first hand with the youthful offender. Assigning a weight to such evidence calls for caution, but it cannot be ignored if we are to avoid the gross stereotype of the juvenile delinquent as a hardened gangster in miniature.

In the second place, observers have noted that the juvenile delinquent frequently accords admiration and respect to law-abiding persons. The “really honest” is often revered, and if the delinquent is sometimes overly keen to detect hypocrisy in those who conform, unquestioned probity is likely to win his approval. A fierce attachment to a humble, pious mother or a forgiving, upright priest (the former, according to many observers, is often encountered in both juvenile delinquents and adult criminals) might be dismissed as rank sentimentality, but at least it is clear that the delinquent does not necessarily regard those who abide by the legal rules as immoral. In a similar vein, it can be noted that the juvenile delinquent may exhibit great resentment if illegal behavior is imputed to “significant others” in his immediate

social environment or to heroes in the world of sport and entertainment. In other words, if the delinquent does hold to a set of values and norms that stand in complete opposition to those of respectable society, his norm-holding is of a peculiar sort. While supposedly thoroughly committed to the deviant system of the delinquent sub-culture, he would appear to recognize the moral validity of the dominant normative system in many instances.

In the third place, there is much evidence that juvenile delinquents often draw a sharp line between those who can be victimized and those who cannot. Certain social groups are not to be viewed as “fair game” in the performance of supposedly approved delinquent acts while others warrant a variety of attacks. In general, the potentiality for victimization would seem to be a function of the social distance between the juvenile delinquent and others and thus we find implicit maxims in the world of the delinquent such as “don’t steal from friends” or “don’t commit vandalism against a church of your own faith.” This is all rather obvious, but the implications have not received sufficient attention. The fact that supposedly valued behavior tends to be directed against disvalued social groups hints that the “wrongfulness” of such delinquent behavior is more widely recognized by delinquents than the literature has indicated. When the pool of victims is limited by considerations of kinship, friendship, ethnic group, social class, age, sex, etc., we have reason to suspect that the virtue of delinquency is far from unquestioned.

In the fourth place, it is doubtful if many juvenile delinquents are totally immune from the demands for conformity made by the dominant social order. There is a strong likelihood that the family of the delinquent will agree with respectable society that delinquency is wrong, even though the family may be engaged in a variety of illegal activities. That is, the parental posture conducive to delinquency is not apt to be a positive prodding. Whatever may be the influence of parental example, what might be called the

"Fagin" pattern of socialization into delinquency is probably rare. Furthermore, as Redl has indicated, the idea that certain neighborhoods are completely delinquent, offering the child a model for delinquent behavior without reservations, is simply not supported by the data.

The fact that a child is punished by parents, school officials, and agencies of the legal system for his delinquency may, as a number of observers have cynically noted, suggest to the child that he should be more careful not to get caught. There is an equal or greater probability, however, that the child will internalize the demands for conformity. This is not to say that demands for conformity cannot be counteracted. In fact, as we shall see shortly, an understanding of how internal and external demands for conformity are neutralized may be crucial for understanding delinquent behavior. But it is to say that a complete denial of the validity of demands for conformity and the substitution of a new normative system is improbable, in light of the child's or adolescent's dependency on adults and encirclement by adults inherent in his status in the social structure. No matter how deeply enmeshed in patterns of delinquency he may be and no matter how much this involvement may outweigh his associations with the law-abiding, he cannot escape the condemnation of his deviance. Somehow the demands for conformity must be met and answered; they cannot be ignored as part of an alien system of values and norms.

In short, the theoretical viewpoint that sees juvenile delinquency as a form of behavior based on the values and norms of a deviant subculture in precisely the same way as law-abiding behavior is based on the values and norms of the larger society is open to serious doubt. The fact that the world of the delinquent is embedded in the larger world of those who conform cannot be overlooked nor can the delinquent be equated with an adult thoroughly socialized into an alternative way of life. Instead, the juvenile delinquent would appear to be at least partially committed to the dominant social order in

that he frequently exhibits guilt or shame when he violates its proscriptions, accords approval to certain conforming figures, and distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate targets for his deviance. It is to an explanation for the apparent paradoxical fact of his delinquency that we now turn.

As Morris Cohen once said, one of the most fascinating problems about human behavior is why men violate the laws in which they believe. This is the problem that confronts us when we attempt to explain why delinquency occurs despite a greater or lesser commitment to the usages of conformity. A basic clue is offered by the fact that social rules or norms calling for valued behavior seldom if ever take the form of categorical imperatives. Rather, values or norms appear as *qualified* guides for action, limited in their applicability in terms of time, place, persons, and social circumstances. The moral injunction against killing, for example, does not apply to the enemy during combat in time of war, although a captured enemy comes once again under the prohibition. Similarly, the taking and distributing of scarce goods in a time of acute social need is felt by many to be right, although under other circumstances private property is held inviolable. The normative system of a society, then, is marked by what Williams has termed *flexibility*; it does not consist of a body of rules held to be binding under all conditions.

This flexibility is, in fact, an integral part of the criminal law in that measures for "defenses to crimes" are provided in pleas such as nonage, necessity, insanity, drunkenness, compulsion, self-defense, and so on. The individual can avoid moral culpability for his criminal action—and thus avoid the negative sanctions of society—if he can prove that criminal intent was lacking.

It is our argument that much delinquency is based on what is essentially an unrecognized extension of defenses to crimes, in the form of justifications for deviance that are seen as valid by the delinquent but not by the legal system or society at large.

These justifications are commonly described as rationalizations. They are viewed as following deviant behavior and as protecting the individual from self-blame and the blame of others after the act. But there is also reason to believe that they precede deviant behavior and make deviant behavior possible. It is this possibility that Sutherland mentioned only in passing and that other writers have failed to exploit from the viewpoint of sociological theory. Disapproval flowing from internalized norms and conforming others in the social environment is neutralized, turned back, or deflected in advance. Social controls that serve to check or inhibit deviant motivational patterns are rendered inoperative, and the individual is freed to engage in delinquency without serious damage to his self image. In this sense, the delinquent both has his cake and eats it too, for he remains committed to the dominant normative system and yet so qualifies its imperatives that violations are "acceptable" if not "right." Thus the delinquent represents not a radical opposition to law-abiding society but something more like an apologetic failure, often more sinned against than sinning in his own eyes. We call these justifications of deviant behavior techniques of neutralization; and we believe these techniques make up a crucial component of Sutherland's "definitions favorable to the violation of law." It is by learning these techniques that the juvenile becomes delinquent, rather than by learning moral imperatives, values or attitudes standing in direct contradiction to those of the dominant society. In analyzing these techniques, we have found it convenient to divide them into five major types.

The Denial of Responsibility

In so far as the delinquent can define himself as lacking responsibility for his deviant actions, the disapproval of self or others is sharply reduced in effectiveness as a restraining influence. As Justice Holmes has said, even a dog distinguishes between being stumbled over and being kicked, and modern society is no less careful to draw a

line between injuries that are unintentional, i.e., where responsibility is lacking, and those that are intentional. As a technique of neutralization, however, the denial of responsibility extends much further than the claim that deviant acts are an "accident" or some similar negation of personal accountability. It may also be asserted that delinquent acts are due to forces outside of the individual and beyond his control such as unloving parents, bad companions, or a slum neighborhood. In effect, the delinquent approaches a "billiard ball" conception of himself in which he sees himself as helplessly propelled into new situations. From a psychodynamic viewpoint, this orientation toward one's own actions may represent a profound alienation from self, but it is important to stress the fact that interpretations of responsibility are cultural constructs and not merely idiosyncratic beliefs. The similarity between this mode of justifying illegal behavior assumed by the delinquent and the implications of a "sociological" frame of reference or a "humane" jurisprudence is readily apparent. It is not the validity of this orientation that concerns us here, but its function of deflecting blame attached to violations of social norms and its relative independence of a particular personality structure. By learning to view himself as more acted upon than acting, the delinquent prepares the way for deviance from the dominant normative system without the necessity of a frontal assault on the norms themselves.

The Denial of Injury

A second major technique of neutralization centers on the injury or harm involved in the delinquent act. The criminal law has long made a distinction between crimes which are *mala in se* and *mala prohibita*—that is between acts that are wrong in themselves and acts that are illegal but not immoral—and the delinquent can make the same kind of distinction in evaluating the wrongfulness of his behavior. For the delinquent, however, wrongfulness may turn on the question of

whether or not anyone has clearly been hurt by his deviance, and this matter is open to a variety of interpretations. Vandalism, for example, may be defined by the delinquent simply as "mischief"—after all, it may be claimed, the persons whose property has been destroyed can well afford it. Similarly, auto theft may be viewed as "borrowing," and gang fighting may be seen as a private quarrel, an agreed upon duel between two willing parties, and thus of no concern to the community at large. We are not suggesting that this technique of neutralization, labelled the denial of injury, involves an explicit dialectic, rather, we are arguing that the delinquent frequently, and in a hazy fashion, feels that his behavior does not really cause any great harm despite the fact that it runs counter to law. Just as the link between the individual and his acts may be broken by the denial of responsibility, so may the link between acts and their consequences be broken by the denial of injury. Since society sometimes agrees with the delinquent, e.g., in matters such as truancy, "pranks," and so on, it merely reaffirms the idea that the delinquent's neutralization of social controls by means of qualifying the norms is an extension of common practice rather than a gesture of complete opposition.

The Denial of Victim

Even if the delinquent accepts the responsibility for his deviant actions and is willing to admit that his deviant actions involve an injury or hurt, the moral indignation of self and others may be neutralized by an insistence that the injury is not wrong in light of the circumstances. The injury, it may be claimed, is not really an injury; rather, it is a form of rightful retaliation or punishment. By a subtle alchemy the delinquent moves himself into the position of an avenger and the victim is transformed into a wrong-doer. Assaults on homosexuals or suspected homosexuals, attacks on members of minority groups who are said to have gotten "out of place," vandalism as revenge on an unfair teacher or school official, thefts

from a "crooked" store owner—all may be hurts inflicted on a transgressor, in the eyes of the delinquent. As Orwell has pointed out, the type of criminal admired by the general public has probably changed over the course of years and Raffles no longer serves as a hero; but Robin Hood, and his latter-day derivatives such as the tough detective seeking justice outside the law, still capture the popular imagination, and the delinquent may view his acts as part of a similar role. To deny the existence of the victim, then, by transforming him into a person deserving injury is an extreme form of a phenomenon we have mentioned before, namely, the delinquent's recognition of appropriate and inappropriate targets for his delinquent acts. In addition, however, the existence of the victim may be denied for the delinquent, in a somewhat different sense, by the circumstances of the delinquent act itself. Insofar as the victim is physically absent, unknown, or a vague abstraction (as is often the case in delinquent acts committed against property), the awareness of the victim's existence is weakened. Internalized norms and anticipations of the reactions of others must somehow be activated, if they are to serve as guides for behavior; and it is possible that a diminished awareness of the victim plays an important part in determining whether or not this process is set in motion.

The Condemnation of the Condemners

A fourth technique of neutralization would appear to involve a condemnation of the condemners or, as McCorkle and Korn have phrased it, a rejection of the rejectors. The delinquent shifts the focus of attention from his own deviant acts to the motives and behavior of those who disapprove of his violations. His condemners, he may claim, are hypocrites, deviants in disguise, or impelled by personal spite. This orientation toward the conforming world may be of particular importance when it hardens into a bitter cynicism directed against those assigned the task of

enforcing or expressing the norms of the dominant society. Police, it may be said, are corrupt, stupid, and brutal. Teachers always show favoritism and parents always "take it out" on their children. By a slight extension, the rewards of conformity—such as material success—become a matter of pull or luck, thus decreasing still further the stature of those who stand on the side of the law-abiding. The validity of this jaundiced viewpoint is not so important as its function in turning back or deflecting the negative sanctions attached to violations of the norms. The delinquent, in effect, has changed the subject of the conversation in the dialogue between his own deviant impulses and the reactions of others; and by attacking others, the wrongfulness of his own behavior is more easily repressed or lost to view.

The Appeal to Higher Loyalties

Fifth, and last, internal and external social controls may be neutralized by sacrificing the demands of the larger society for the demands of the smaller social groups to which the delinquent belongs such as the sibling pair, the gang, or the friendship clique. It is important to note that the delinquent does not necessarily repudiate the imperatives of the dominant normative system, despite his failure to follow them. Rather, the delinquent may see himself as caught up in a dilemma that must be resolved, unfortunately, at the cost of violating the law. One aspect of this situation has been studied by Stouffer and Toby in their research on the conflict between particularistic and universalistic demands, between the claims of friendship and general social obligations, and their results suggest that "it is possible to classify people according to a predisposition to select one or the other horn of a dilemma in role conflict." For our purposes, however, the most important point is that deviation from certain norms may occur not because the norms are rejected but because other norms, held to be more pressing or involving a higher loyalty, are accorded precedence. Indeed, it is the fact that both

sets of norms are believed in that gives meaning to our concepts of dilemma and role conflict.

The conflict between the claims of friendship and the claims of law, or a similar dilemma, has of course long been recognized by the social scientist (and the novelist) as a common human problem. If the juvenile delinquent frequently resolves his dilemma by insisting that he must "always help a buddy" or "never squeal on a friend," even when it throws him into serious difficulties with the dominant social order, his choice remains familiar to the supposedly law-abiding. The delinquent is unusual, perhaps, in the extent to which he is able to see the fact that he acts in behalf of the smaller social groups to which he belongs as a justification for violations of society's norms, but it is a matter of degree rather than of kind.

"I didn't mean it." "I didn't really hurt anybody." "They had it coming to them." "Everybody's picking on me." "I didn't do it for myself." These slogans or their variants, we hypothesize, prepare the juvenile for delinquent acts. These "definitions of the situation" represent tangential or glancing blows at the dominant normative system rather than the creation of an opposing ideology; and they are extensions of patterns of thought prevalent in society rather than something created *de novo*.

Techniques of neutralization may not be powerful enough to fully shield the individual from the force of his own internalized values and the reactions of conforming others, for as we have pointed out, juvenile delinquents often appear to suffer from feelings of guilt and shame when called into account for their deviant behavior. And some delinquents may be so isolated from the world of conformity that techniques of neutralization need not be called into play. Nonetheless, we would argue that techniques of neutralization are critical in lessening the effectiveness of social controls and that they lie behind a large share of delinquent behavior.

Empirical research in this area is scattered and fragmentary at the present time, but the work of Redl, Cressy, and others has supplied a body of

significant data that has done much to clarify the theoretical issues and enlarge the fund of supporting evidence. Two lines of investigation seem to be critical at this stage. First, there is need for more knowledge concerning the differential distribution of techniques of neutralization, as operative patterns of thought, by age, sex, social class, ethnic group, etc. On *a priori* grounds it might be assumed that these justifications for deviance will be more readily seized by segments of society for whom a discrepancy between common social ideals and social practice is most apparent. It is also possible however, that the habit of “bending” the dominant normative system—if not “breaking” it—cuts across our cruder social categories and is to be traced primarily to patterns of social interaction within the familial circle. Second, there is need for a greater understanding of the internal

structure of techniques of neutralization, as a system of beliefs and attitudes, and its relationship to various types of delinquent behavior. Certain techniques of neutralization would appear to be better adapted to particular deviant acts than to others, as we have suggested, for example, in the case of offenses against property and the denial of the victim. But the issue remains far from clear and stands in need of more information.

In any case, techniques of neutralization appear to offer a promising line of research in enlarging and systematizing the theoretical grasp of juvenile delinquency. As more information is uncovered concerning techniques of neutralization, their origins, and their consequences, both juvenile delinquency in particular, and deviation from normative systems in general may be illuminated.

Discussion Questions

1. In their article, Sykes and Matza paraphrase Morris Cohen: “One of the most fascinating problems about human behavior is why men violate the laws in which they believe.” What solution do Sykes and Matza offer to this problem?
2. Most students disapprove of cheating on exams, but many nevertheless cheat. List possible justifications such students might give

for their cheating behavior. Which techniques of neutralizations do these justifications illustrate?

3. Sykes and Matza argue that the techniques of neutralization are learned from others. They do not, however, describe those groups or types of individuals that are most likely to employ the techniques of neutralization. What groups or categories of individuals do you think are most likely to employ the techniques of neutralization (and why)?

14. Social Bond Theory

Travis Hirschi

Although Causes of Delinquency is a complex book filled with intricate theoretical discussions and numerous statistical analyses, Hirschi's theory has an appealing quality: It can be simply stated and thus easily understood and studied by criminologists. Indeed, his theory can be reduced to two propositions. First, delinquency and social bonds are inversely related. Second, the concept of social bonds has four elements—attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief—that independently and in combination restrain criminal conduct.

But how exactly do these bonds exert control over youngsters? Hirschi argued that youths can be attached to peers, teachers, and other adults, although relationships with parents are most crucial. Attachment involves an emotional connection to another person. When such a relationship exists, youths will be more likely to care what that other person thinks of them. In turn, when in a situation where the opportunity for trouble presents itself, they will be restrained from delinquency if they are concerned that such action will disappoint the other person or disrupt this relationship.

The importance of attachment is that during the teenage years, youths are frequently outside their parents' watchful eyes. In such instances, parents cannot exert "direct control"—that is, personally supervise their children and punish misconduct when it occurs. They can, however, exert "indirect control" if youths take into account their parents' preferences. When attachment is strong, observed

Hirschi, "the parent is psychologically present when temptation to commit a crime appears. If, in the situation of temptation, no thought is given to parental reaction, the child is to this extent free to commit the act" (1969: 88).

Much like rational choice theory (see Part X), Hirschi suggested that there is a "rational component" to conformity, which he calls "commitment." Juveniles who are doing well in school and have bright prospects ahead are less likely to engage in acts that will jeopardize their future. Conversely, uncommitted youths—those with little or no stake in conformity—have nothing to lose and thus are freer to break the law.

Hirschi also contended that the mere involvement in conventional activities facilitates control. If idleness presents opportunities for crime, filling up a youth's day with wholesome activities—such as school and recreational pursuits—leaves little time for getting into trouble.

Finally, Hirschi (1969: 26) argued that youths who believe that they should "obey the rules of society" are less likely to violate them. The social bond of "belief" is controversial because such beliefs or "definitions" are also central to differential association theory (or what Hirschi called "cultural deviance" theory). Hirschi contended, however, that an important analytical distinction could be made: While cultural deviance theorists like Sutherland (Chapter 6) focus on beliefs that positively value crime ("definitions favorable to violation of law"),

control theorists focus on beliefs that proscribe crime. "Delinquency is not caused by beliefs that require delinquency," noted Hirschi (1969: 198), "but rather made possible by the absence of (effective) beliefs that forbid delinquency."

Hirschi's social bond theory has been subjected to numerous empirical tests—perhaps more than any other theory. Although empirical confirmation of the theory varies by such factors as a study's methodology (Agnew, 1985; Costello and Vowell, 1999; Kempf, 1993; Krohn, 2000; Kubrin et al., 2009), overall there is fairly consistent support for the general thesis that weak social bonds increase the risk of being involved in criminal behavior (Akers and Sellers, 2008; Sampson and Laub, 1993). Hirschi's claim that competing perspectives—especially "cultural deviance" theories—are not empirically viable, however, is mistaken (Akers and Sellers, 2008; Krohn, 2000; Kubrin et al., 2009). A further limitation is that Hirschi's approach is largely astructural and ahistorical. Unlike Shaw and McKay (Chapter 3), he does not examine how macrosocial changes occurring in the United States affect the strength of social bonds for people located in different sectors of American society (see also Sampson and Wilson, 1995 [Chapter 43]; Sampson and Laub, 1994).

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Three fundamental perspectives on delinquency and deviant behavior dominate the current scene. According to *strain* or *motivational* theories, legitimate desires that conformity cannot satisfy force a person into deviance. According to *control* or *bond* theories, a person is free to commit delinquent acts because his ties to the conventional order have somehow been broken. According to *cultural deviance* theories, the deviant conforms to a set of standards not accepted by a larger or more powerful society. Although most current theories of crime and delinquency contain elements of at least two and occasionally all three of these perspectives, reconciliation of their assumptions is very difficult. If, as the control theorist assumes, the ties of many persons to the conventional order may be weak or virtually nonexistent, the strain theorist, in accounting for their deviance, builds into his explanation pressure that is unnecessary. If, on the other hand, it

is reasonable to assume with the strain theorist that everyone is at some point strongly tied to the conventional system, then it is unreasonable to assume that many are not (control theories), or that many are tied to different "conventional" systems (cultural deviance theories). . . .

Control theories assume that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken. Since these theories embrace two highly complex concepts, the *bond* of the individual to *society*, it is not surprising that they have at one time or another formed the basis of explanations of most forms of aberrant or unusual behavior. It is also not surprising that control theories have described the elements of the bond to society in many ways, and that they have focused on a variety of units as the point of control. . . .

Elements of the Bond

Attachment

In explaining conforming behavior, sociologists justly emphasize sensitivity to the opinion of others. Unfortunately, as suggested in the preceding chapter, they tend to suggest that man is sensitive to the opinion of others and thus exclude sensitivity from their explanations of deviant behavior. In explaining deviant behavior, psychologists, in contrast, emphasize insensitivity to the opinion of others. Unfortunately, they too tend to ignore variation, and, in addition, they tend to tie sensitivity inextricably to other variables, to make it part of a syndrome or "type," and thus seriously to reduce its value as an explanatory concept. The psychopath is characterized only in part by "deficient attachment to or affection for others, a failure to respond to the ordinary motivations founded in respect or regard for one's fellows"; he is also characterized by such things as "excessive aggressiveness," "lack of superego control," and "an infantile level of response." Unfortunately, too, the behavior that psychopathy is used to explain often becomes part of the *definition* of psychopathy. As a result, in Barbara Wootton's words:

[The psychopath] is . . . *par excellence*, and without shame or qualification, the model of the circular process by which mental abnormality is inferred from anti-social behavior while anti-social behavior is explained by mental abnormality.

The problems of diagnosis, tautology, and name-calling are avoided if the dimensions of psychopathy are treated as causally and therefore problematically interrelated, rather than as logically and therefore necessarily bound to each other. In fact, it can be argued that all of the characteristics attributed to the psychopath follow from, are effects of, his lack of attachment to others. To say that to lack attachment to others is to be free from moral restraints is to use lack of attachment to explain the guiltlessness of the psychopath, the fact that he apparently has no conscience or superego. In this view, lack of attachment to others is not merely a symptom of psychopathy, it is psychopathy; lack of conscience is just another way of saying the same thing; and the violation of norms is (or may be) a consequence.

For that matter, given that man is an animal, "impulsivity" and "aggressiveness" can also be seen as natural consequences of freedom from moral restraints. However, since the view of man as endowed with natural propensities and capacities like other animals is peculiarly unpalatable to sociologists, we need not fall back on such a view to explain the amoral man's aggressiveness. The process of becoming alienated from others often involves or is based on active interpersonal conflict. Such conflict could easily supply a reservoir of *socially derived* hostility sufficient to account for the aggressiveness of those whose attachments to others have been weakened.

Durkheim said it many years ago: "We are moral beings to the extent that we are social beings." This may be interpreted to mean that we are moral beings to the extent that we have "internalized the norms" of society. But what does it mean to say that a person has internalized the

norms of society? The norms of society are by definition shared by the members of society. To violate a norm is, therefore, to act contrary to the wishes and expectations of other people. If a person does not care about the wishes and expectations of other people—that is, if he is insensitive to the opinion of others—then he is to that extent not bound by the norms. He is free to deviate.

The essence of internalization of norms, conscience, or super-ego thus lies in the attachment of the individual to others. This view has several advantages over the concept of internalization. For one, explanations of deviant behavior based on attachment do not beg the question, since the extent to which a person is attached to others can be measured independently of his deviant behavior. Furthermore, change or variation in behavior is explainable in a way that it is not when notions of internalization or superego are used. For example, the divorced man is more likely after divorce to commit a number of deviant acts, such as suicide or forgery. If we explain these acts by reference to the superego (or internal control), we are forced to say that the man “lost his conscience” when he got a divorce; and, of course, if he remarries, we have to conclude that he gets his conscience back.

This dimension of the bond to conventional society is encountered in most social control-oriented research and theory. F. Ivan Nye’s “internal control” and “indirect control” refer to the same element, although we avoid the problem of explaining changes over time by locating the “conscience” in the bond to others rather than making it part of the personality. Attachment to others is just one aspect of Albert J. Reiss’s “personal controls”; we avoid his problems of tautological empirical *observations* by making the relationship between attachment and delinquency problematic rather than definitional. Finally, Scott Briar and Irving Piliavin’s “commitment” or “stake in conformity” subsumes attachment, as their discussion illustrates, although the terms they use are more closely associated with the next element to be discussed.

Commitment

“Of all passions, that which inclineth men least to break the laws, is fear. Nay, excepting some generous natures, it is the only thing, when there is the appearance of profit or pleasure by breaking the laws, that makes men keep them.” Few would deny that men on occasion obey the rules simply from fear of the consequences. This rational component in conformity we label commitment. What does it mean to say that a person is committed to conformity? In Howard S. Becker’s formulation it means the following:

First, the individual is in a position in which his decision with regard to some particular line of action has consequences for other interests and activities not necessarily [directly] related to it. Second, he has placed himself in that position by his own prior actions. A third element is present though so obvious as not to be aware [of other interests] and must recognize that his decision in this case will have ramifications beyond it.

The idea, then, is that the person invests time, energy, himself, in a certain line of activity—say, getting an education, building up a business, acquiring a reputation for virtue. When or whenever he considers deviant behavior, he must consider the costs of this deviant behavior, the risk he runs of losing the investment he has made in conventional labor.

If attachment to others is the sociological counterpart of the superego or conscience, commitment is the counterpart of the ego or common sense. To the person committed to conventional lines of action, risking one to ten years in prison for a ten-dollar holdup is stupidity, because to the committed person the costs and risks obviously exceed ten dollars in value. (To the psychoanalyst, such an act exhibits failure to be governed by the “reality-principle.”) In the sociological control theory, it can be and is generally assumed that the decision to commit a criminal act may well be rationally determined—that the actor’s decision was not irrational given the risks and

costs he faces. Of course, as Becker points out, if the actor is capable of in some sense calculating the costs of a line of action, he is also capable of calculational errors: ignorance and error return, in the control theory, as possible explanations of deviant behavior.

The concept of commitment assumes that the organization of society is such that the interests of most persons would be endangered if they were to engage in criminal acts. Most people, simply by the process of living in an organized society, acquire goods, reputations, prospects that they do not want to risk losing. These accumulations are society's insurance that they will abide by the rules. Many hypotheses about the antecedents of delinquent behavior are based on this premise. For example, Arthur L. Stinchcombe's hypothesis that "high school rebellion . . . occurs when future status is not clearly related to present performance" suggests that one is committed to conformity not only by what one has but also by what one hopes to obtain. Thus "ambition" and/or "aspiration" play an important role in producing conformity. The person becomes committed to a conventional line of action, and he is therefore committed to conformity.

Most lines of action in a society are of course conventional. The clearest examples are educational and occupational careers. Actions thought to jeopardize one's chances in these areas are presumably avoided. Interestingly enough, even nonconventional commitments may operate to produce conventional conformity. We are told, at least, that boys aspiring to careers in the rackets or professional thievery are judged by their "honesty" and "reliability"—traits traditionally in demand among seekers of office boys.

Involvement

Many persons undoubtedly owe a life of virtue to a lack of opportunity to do otherwise. Time and energy are inherently limited: "Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a bon vivant, and a lady

killer, as well as a philosopher, a philanthropist, a statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a 'tone-poet' and saint. But the thing is simply impossible." The things that William James here says he would like to be or do are all, I suppose, within the realm of conventionality, but if he were to include illicit actions he would still have to eliminate some of them as simply impossible.

Involvement or engrossment in conventional activities is thus often part of a control theory. The assumption, widely shared, is that a person may be simply too busy doing conventional things to find time to engage in deviant behavior. The person involved in conventional activities is tied to appointments, deadlines, working hours, plans, and the like, so the opportunity to commit deviant acts rarely arises. To the extent that he is engrossed in conventional activities, he cannot even think about deviant acts, let alone act out his inclinations.

This line of reasoning is responsible for the stress placed on recreational facilities in many programs to reduce delinquency, for much of the concern with the high school dropout, and for the idea that boys should be drafted into the Army to keep them out of trouble. So obvious and persuasive is the idea that involvement in conventional activities is a major deterrent to delinquency that it was accepted even by Sutherland:

In the general area of juvenile delinquency it is probable that the most significant difference between juveniles who engage in delinquency and those who do not is that the latter are provided abundant opportunities of a conventional type for satisfying their recreational interests, while the former lack those opportunities or facilities.

The view that "idle hands are the devil's workshop" has received more sophisticated treatment in recent sociological writings on delinquency. David Matza and Gresham M. Sykes, for example, suggest that delinquents have the values of a leisure class, the same values ascribed by Veblen to *the* leisure class: a search for

kicks, disdain of work, a desire for the big score, and acceptance of aggressive toughness as proof of masculinity. Matza and Sykes explain delinquency by reference to this system of values, but they note that adolescents at all class levels are "to some extent" members of a leisure class, that they "move in a limbo between earlier parental domination and future integration with the social structure through the bonds of work and marriage." In the end, then, the leisure of the adolescent produces a set of values, which, in turn, leads to delinquency.

Belief

Unlike the cultural deviance theory, the control theory assumes the existence of a common value system within the society or group whose norms are being violated. If the deviant is committed to a value system different from that of conventional society, there is, within the context of the theory, nothing to explain. The question is, "Why does a man violate the rules in which he believes?" It is not, "Why do men differ in their beliefs about what constitutes good and desirable conduct?" The person is assumed to have been socialized (perhaps imperfectly) into the group whose rules he is violating; deviance is not a question of one group imposing its rules on the members of another group. In other words, we not only assume the deviant *has* believed the rules, we assume he believes the rules even as he violates them.

How can a person believe it is wrong to steal at the same time he is stealing? In the strain theory, this is not a difficult problem. (In fact, as suggested in the previous chapter, the strain theory was devised specifically to deal with this question.) The motivation to deviance adduced by the strain theorist is so strong that we can well understand the deviant act even assuming the deviator believes strongly that it is wrong. However, given the control theory's assumptions about motivation, if both the deviant and the nondeviant believe the deviant act is wrong, how do we account for the fact that one commits it and the other does not?

Control theories have taken two approaches to this problem. In one approach, beliefs are treated as mere words that mean little or nothing if the other forms of control are missing. "Semantic dementia," the dissociation between rational faculties and emotional control which is said to be characteristic of the psychopath, illustrates this way of handling the problem. In short, beliefs, at least insofar as they are expressed in words, drop out of the picture; since they do not differentiate between deviants and nondeviants, they are in the same class as "language" or any other characteristic common to all members of the group. Since they represent no real obstacle to the commission of delinquent acts, nothing need be said about how they are handled by those committing such acts. The control theories that do not mention beliefs (or values), and many do not, may be assumed to take this approach to the problem.

The second approach argues that the deviant rationalizes his behavior so that he can at once violate the rule and maintain his belief in it. Donald R. Cressey has advanced this argument with respect to embezzlement, and Sykes and Matza have advanced it with respect to delinquency. In both Cressey's and Sykes and Matza's treatments, these rationalizations (Cressey calls them "verbalizations," Sykes and Matza term them "techniques of neutralization") occur prior to the commission of the deviant act. If the neutralization is successful, the person is free to commit the act(s) in question. Both in Cressey and in Sykes and Matza, the strain that prompts the effort at neutralization also provides the motive force that results in the subsequent deviant act. Their theories are thus, in this sense, strain theories. Neutralization is difficult to handle within the context of a theory that adheres closely to control theory assumptions, because in the control theory there is no special motivational force to account for the neutralization. This difficulty is especially noticeable in Matza's later treatment of this topic, where the motivational component, the "will to delinquency" appears *after* the moral

vacuum has been created by the techniques of the neutralization. The question thus becomes: Why neutralize?

In attempting to solve a strain theory problem with control theory tools, the control theorist is thus led into a trap. He cannot answer the crucial question. The concept of neutralization assumes the existence of moral obstacles to the commission of deviant acts. In order plausibly to account for a deviant act, it is necessary to generate motivation to deviance that is at least equivalent in force to the resistance provided by these moral obstacles. However, if the moral obstacles are removed, neutralization and special motivation are no longer required. We therefore follow the implicit logic of control theory and remove these moral obstacles by hypothesis. Many persons do not have an attitude of respect toward the rules of society; many persons feel no moral obligation to conform regardless of personal advantage. Insofar as the values and beliefs of these persons are consistent with their feelings, and there should be a tendency toward consistency, neutralization is unnecessary; it has already occurred.

Does this merely push the question back a step and at the same time produce conflict with the assumption of a common value system? I think not. In the first place, we do not assume, as does Cressey, that neutralization occurs in order to make a specific criminal act possible. We do not assume, as do Sykes and Matza, that neutralization occurs to make many delinquent acts possible. We do not assume, in other words, that the person constructs a system of rationalizations in order to justify commission of acts he *wants* to commit. We assume, in contrast, that the beliefs that free a man to commit deviant acts are *unmotivated* in the sense that he does not construct or adopt them in order to facilitate the attainment of illicit ends. In the second place, we do not assume, as does Matza, that "delinquents concur in the conventional assessment of delinquency." We assume, in contrast, that there is *variation* in the extent to which people believe they should obey the rules of society, and, furthermore, that

the less a person believes he should obey the rules, the more likely he is to violate them.

In chronological order, then, a person's beliefs in the moral validity of norms are, for no teleological reason, weakened. The probability that he will commit delinquent acts is therefore increased. When and if he commits a delinquent act, we may justifiably use the weakness of his beliefs in explaining it, but no special motivation is required to explain either the weakness of his beliefs or, perhaps, his delinquent act.

The keystone of this argument is of course the assumption that there is variation in belief in the moral validity of social rules. This assumption is amenable to direct empirical test and can thus survive at least until its first confrontation with data. For the present, we must return to the idea of a common value system with which this section was begun.

The idea of a common (or, perhaps better, a single) value system is consistent with the fact, or presumption, of variation in the strength of moral beliefs. We have not suggested that delinquency is based on beliefs counter to conventional morality; we have not suggested that delinquents do not believe delinquent acts are wrong, but the meaning and efficacy of such beliefs are contingent upon other beliefs and, indeed, on the strength of other ties to the conventional order.

Where Is the Motivation?

The most disconcerting question the control theorist faces goes something like this: "Yes, but *why* do they do it?" In the good old days, the control theorist could simply strip away the "veneer of civilization" and expose man's "animal impulses" for all to see. These impulses appeared to him (and apparently to his audience) to provide a plausible account of the motivation to crime and delinquency. His argument was *not* that delinquents and criminals alone are animals, but that we are all animals, and thus all naturally capable of committing criminal acts. It took no great study to reveal that children,

chickens, and dogs occasionally assault and steal from their fellow creatures; that children, chickens, and dogs also behave for relatively long periods in a perfectly moral manner. Of course the acts of chickens and dogs are not "assault" or "theft," and such behavior is not "moral"; it is simply the behavior of a chicken or a dog. The chicken stealing corn from his neighbor knows nothing of the moral law; he does not *want* to violate rules; he wants merely to eat corn. The dog maliciously destroying a pillow or feloniously assaulting another dog is the moral equal of the chicken. No motivation to deviance is required to explain his acts. So, too, no special motivation to crime within the human animal was required to explain his criminal acts.

Times changed. It was no longer fashionable (within sociology, at least) to refer to animal impulses. The control theorist tended more and more to deemphasize the motivational component of his theory. He might refer in the beginning to "universal human needs," or some such, but the driving force behind crime and delinquency was rarely alluded to. At the same time, his explanations of crime and delinquency left the reader uneasy. What, the reader asked, is the control theorist assuming? Albert K. Cohen and James F. Short answer the question this way:

... it is important to point out one important limitation of both types of theory. They [culture conflict and social disorganization theories] are both *control* theories in the sense that they explain delinquency in terms of the *absence* of effective controls. They appear, therefore, to imply a model of motivation that assumes that the impulse to delinquency is an inherent characteristic of young people and does not itself need to be explained; it is something that erupts when the lid—i.e., internalized cultural restraints or external authority—is off.

There are several possible and I think reasonable reactions to this criticism. One reaction is simply to acknowledge the assumption, to grant that one is assuming what control theorists have

always assumed about the motivation to crime—that it is constant across persons (at least within the system in question):

There is no reason to assume that only those who finally commit a deviant act usually have the impulse to do so. It is much more likely that most people experience deviant impulses frequently. At least in fantasy, people are much more deviant than they appear.

There is certainly nothing wrong with *making* such an assumption. We are free to assume anything we wish to assume; the truth of our theory is presumably subject to empirical test.

A second reaction, involving perhaps something of a quibble, is to defend the logic of control theory and to deny the alleged assumption. We can say the fact that control theory suggests the absence of something causes delinquency is not a proper criticism, since negative relations have as much claim to scientific acceptability as do positive relations. We can also say that the present theory does not impute an inherent impulse to *delinquency* to anyone. That, on the contrary, it denies the necessity of such an imputation:

The desires, and other passions of man, are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions, that proceed from those passions, till they know a law that forbids them.

A third reaction is to accept the criticism as valid, to grant that a complete explanation of delinquency would provide the necessary impetus, and proceed to construct an explanation of motivation consistent with control theory. Briar and Piliavin provide situational motivation:

We assume these acts are prompted by short-term situationally induced desires experienced by all boys to obtain valued goods, to portray courage in the presence of, or be loyal to peers, to strike out at someone who is disliked, or simply to "get kicks."

... There are several additional accounts of "why they do it" that are to my mind persuasive

and at the same time generally compatible with control theory. But while all of these accounts may be compatible with control theory, they are by no means deducible from it. Furthermore, they rarely impute built-in, unusual motivation to the delinquent: he is attempting to satisfy the same desires, he is reacting to the same pressures as other boys (as is clear, for example, in the previous quotation from Briar and Piliavin). In other words, if included, these accounts of motivation would serve the same function in the theory

that “animal impulses” traditionally served: they might add to its persuasiveness and plausibility, but they would add little else, since they do not differentiate delinquents from nondelinquents.

In the end, then, control theory remains what it has always been: a theory in which deviation is not problematic. The question “Why do they do it?” is simply not the question the theory is designed to answer. The question is, “Why don’t we do it?” There is much evidence that we would if we dared.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Hirschi say that the key question for criminologists to answer is “Why don’t they do it?” as opposed to “Why do they do it?”
2. How does control theory differ from strain theory and cultural deviance (i.e., differential association) theory?
3. What are the four elements of the social bond? How does each one help to control a youth from engaging in delinquency?
4. What factors in American society might cause social bonds to be weaker in inner-city neighborhoods?

15. A General Theory of Crime

Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi

Traditional sociological theories placed their primary focus on the social experiences of youths outside the family. For differential association theory, for example, most attention has been given to the role of peer groups in fostering delinquency; for strain theory, the lack of opportunities in school and in the labor market is considered as the source of crime-inducing frustration. In contrast, Gottfredson and Hirschi have redirected the attention of criminologists to the family and to what parents do, or do not do, during childhood.

In his social bond theory, Hirschi emphasized the importance of “indirect control”—how close attachment to parents allows the parents to have a “psychological presence” when youths are not under their surveillance. Gottfredson and Hirschi, however, argue that “direct control” is the key to effective parenting (see Wells and Rankin, 1988). Unless parents monitor their children closely and then take steps to punish misbehavior when it occurs—that is, unless they teach children that breaking rules has consequences—self-control will not be instilled. Instead, the child “will tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, short-sighted, and nonverbal” (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 90). As they endlessly succumb to life’s temporary temptations, children burdened with low self-control will constantly engage in crime and other forms of deviance. They also will lack the persistence needed to succeed in school, in the workplace, and in social

relationships. In short, they will be consigned to a wayward life replete with brushes with the law and with personal and social failure.

We should note that Gottfredson and Hirschi differentiate between “criminality,” which is the propensity to offend, and “crime,” which is an actual event in which a law is broken. They recognize that a propensity cannot be acted on unless the opportunity to do so exists. As a result, they see crime as a byproduct of people with low self-control, who have high criminogenic propensities, coming into contact with illegal opportunities. Still, given that most offenses are easy to commit and opportunities for crime are constantly available, over time people with low self-control inevitably will become deeply involved in criminal behavior. That is, self-control, not opportunities, will be the primary determinant of people’s involvement in crime across their life course.

Similar to social bond theory, the core premise of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory is easily identified and thus amenable to testing: the lower a person’s self-control, the higher his or her involvement in criminal behavior and in acts analogous to crime. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is now a growing body of research assessing self-control theory (for just a few of many possible examples, see Benson and Moore, 1992; Evans et al., 1997; Grasmick et al., 1993; Sellers, 1999). In general, there is fairly consistent support for Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theoretical predictions—a fact that ensures that their self-control theory will remain an important theoretical perspective in the

time ahead (Gottfredson, 2006). The consistent support for the perspective is most apparent in Pratt and Cullen's (2000) meta-analysis of the existing empirical research. They report that across studies testing Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory, low self-control "had an effect size that exceeded .20"—a finding that would "rank self-control as one of the strongest known correlates of crime" (Pratt and Cullen, 2000: 951–952; see also Vazsonyi et al., 2017).

The limits of self-control theory, however, should also be mentioned (see Goode, 2008). Thus, in empirical tests, low self-control cannot, as Gottfredson and Hirschi predict, explain away the effects on crime of other sociological factors, especially the effects of differential association/social learning variables (see, e.g., Evans et al., 1997; Pratt and Cullen, 2000; Unnever et al., 2006). Perhaps more consequential, Gottfredson and Hirschi commit what Currie (1985: 185) calls the "fallacy of autonomy—the belief that what goes on inside the family can usefully be separated from the forces that affect it from the outside: the larger social context in which families are embedded for better or for worse." Thus, despite emphasizing the salience of parenting in crime causation, Gottfredson and Hirschi remain largely silent on the social forces that are transforming the American family and challenging the ability of parents to raise their children effectively.

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Theories of crime lead naturally to interest in the propensities of individuals committing criminal acts. These propensities are often labeled "criminality." In pure classical theory, people committing criminal acts had no special propensities. They merely followed the universal tendency to enhance their own pleasure. If they differed from noncriminals, it was with respect to their location in or comprehension of relevant

sanction systems. For example, the individual cut off from the community will suffer less than others from the ostracism that follows crime; the individual unaware of the natural or legal consequences of criminal behavior cannot be controlled by these consequences to the degree that people aware of them are controlled; the atheist will not be as concerned as the believer about penalties to be exacted in a life beyond death. Classical theories on the whole, then, are today called *control theories*, theories emphasizing the prevention of crime through consequences painful to the individual.

Although, for policy purposes, classical theorists emphasized legal consequences, the importance to them of moral sanctions is so obvious that their theories might well be called underdeveloped *social control* theories. In fact, Bentham's list of the major restraining motives—motives acting to prevent mischievous acts—begins with goodwill, love of reputation, and the desire for amity (1970: 134–36). He goes on to say that fear of detection prevents crime in large part because of detection's consequences for "reputation, and the desire for amity" (p. 138). Put another way, in Bentham's view, the restraining power of legal sanctions in large part stems from their connection to social sanctions.

If crime is evidence of the weakness of social motives, it follows that criminals are less social than noncriminals and that the extent of their asociality may be determined by the nature and number of their crimes. Calculation of the extent of an individual's mischievousness is a complex affair, but in general the more mischievous or depraved the offenses, and the greater their number, the more mischievous or depraved the offender (Bentham 1970: 134–42). (Classical theorists thus had reason to be interested in the seriousness of the offense. The relevance of seriousness to current theories of crime is not so clear.)

Because classical or control theories infer that offenders are not restrained by social motives, it is common to think of them as emphasizing an asocial human nature. Actually, such theories

make people only as asocial as their acts require. Pure or consistent control theories do not add criminality (i.e., personality concepts or attributes such as "aggressiveness" or "extraversion") to individuals beyond that found in their criminal acts. As a result, control theories are suspicious of images of an antisocial, psychopathic, or career offender, or of an offender whose motives to crime are somehow larger than those given in the crimes themselves. Indeed, control theories are compatible with the view that the balance of the total control structure favors conformity, even among offenders:

For in every man, be his disposition ever so depraved, the social motives are those which . . . regulate and determine the general tenor of his life. . . . The general and standing bias of every man's nature is, therefore, towards that side to which the force of the social motives would determine him to adhere. This being the case, the force of the social motives tends continually to put an end to that of the dissocial ones; as, in natural bodies, the force of friction tends to put an end to that which is generated by impulse. Time, then, which wears away the force of the dissocial motives, adds to that of the social. (Bentham 1970: 141)

Positivism brought with it the idea that criminals differ from noncriminals in ways more radical than this, the idea that criminals carry within themselves properties peculiarly and positively conducive to crime. [Previously], we examined the efforts of the major disciplines to identify these properties. Being friendly to both the classical and positivist traditions, we expected to end up with a list of individual properties reliably identified by competent research as useful in the description of "criminality"—such properties as aggressiveness, body build, activity level, and intelligence. We further expected that we would be able to connect these individual-level correlates of criminality directly to the classical idea of crime. As our review progressed, however, we were forced to conclude that we had overestimated the

success of positivism in establishing important differences between "criminals" and "noncriminals" beyond their tendency to commit criminal acts. Stable individual differences in the tendency to commit criminal acts were clearly evident, but many or even most of the other differences between offenders and nonoffenders were not as clear or pronounced as our reading of the literature had led us to expect.

If individual differences in the tendency to commit criminal acts (within an overall tendency for crime to decline with age) are at least potentially explicable within classical theory by reference to the social location of individuals and their comprehension of how the world works, the fact remains that classical theory cannot shed much light on the positivistic finding (denied by most positivistic theories . . .) that these differences *remain reasonably stable with change in the social location of individuals and change in their knowledge of the operation of sanction systems*. This is the problem of self-control, the differential tendency of people to avoid criminal acts whatever the circumstances in which they find themselves. Since this difference among people has attracted a variety of names, we begin by arguing the merits of the concept of self-control.

Self-Control and Alternative Concepts

Our decision to ascribe stable individual differences in criminal behavior to self-control was made only after considering several alternatives, one of which (criminality) we had used before (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1986). A major consideration was consistency between the classical conception of crime and our conception of the criminal. It seemed unwise to try to integrate a choice theory of crime with a deterministic image of the offender, especially when such integration was unnecessary. In fact, the compatibility of the classical view of crime and the idea that people differ in self-control is, in our view, remarkable. As we have seen, classical theory is a theory of social or external control, a theory based on the

idea that the costs of crime depend on the individual's current location in or bond to society. What classical theory lacks is an explicit idea of self-control, the idea that people also differ in the extent to which they are vulnerable to the temptations of the moment. Combining the two ideas thus merely recognizes the simultaneous existence of social and individual restraints on behavior.

An obvious alternative is the concept of criminality. The disadvantages of that concept, however, are numerous. First, it connotes causation or determinism, a positive tendency to crime that is contrary to the classical model and, in our view, contrary to the facts. Whereas self-control suggests that people differ in the extent to which they are restrained from criminal acts, criminality suggests that people differ in the extent to which they are compelled to crime. The concept of self-control is thus consistent with the observation that criminals do not require or need crime, and the concept of criminality is inconsistent with this observation. By the same token, the idea of low self-control is compatible with the observation that criminal acts require no special capabilities, needs, or motivation; they are, in this sense, available to everyone. In contrast, the idea of criminality as a special tendency suggests that criminal acts require special people for their performance and enjoyment. Finally, lack of restraint or low self-control allows almost any deviant, criminal, exciting, or dangerous act; in contrast, the idea of criminality covers only a narrow portion of the apparently diverse acts engaged in by people at one end of the dimension we are now discussing.

The concept of conscience comes closer than criminality to self-control, and is harder to distinguish from it. Unfortunately, that concept has connotations of compulsion (to conformity) not, strictly speaking, consistent with a choice model (or with the operation of conscience). It does not seem to cover the behaviors analogous to crime that appear to be controlled by natural sanctions rather than social or moral sanctions, and in the end it typically refers to how people feel about

their acts rather than to the likelihood that they will or will not commit them. Thus accidents and employment instability are not usually seen as produced by failures of conscience, and writers in the conscience tradition do not typically make the connection between moral and prudent behavior. Finally, conscience is used primarily to summarize the results of learning via negative reinforcement, and even those favorably disposed to its use leave little more to say about it (see, e.g., Eysneck 1977; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985).

We are now in position to describe the nature of self-control, the individual characteristic relevant to the commission of criminal acts. We assume that the nature of this characteristic can be derived directly from the nature of criminal acts. We thus infer from the nature of crime what people who refrain from criminal acts are like before they reach the age at which crime becomes a logical possibility. We then work back further to the factors producing their restraint, back to the causes of self-control. In our view, lack of self-control does not require crime and can be counteracted by situational conditions or other properties of the individual. At the same time, we suggest that high self-control effectively reduces the possibility of crime—that is, those possessing it will be substantially less likely at all periods of life to engage in criminal acts.

The Elements of Self-Control

Criminal acts provide *immediate* gratification of desires. A major characteristic of people with low self-control is therefore a tendency to respond to tangible stimuli in the immediate environment, to have a concrete “here and now” orientation. People with high self-control, in contrast, tend to defer gratification.

Criminal acts provide easy or simple gratification of desires. They provide money without work, sex without courtship, revenge without court delays. People lacking self-control also tend to lack diligence, tenacity, or persistence in a course of action.

Criminal acts are *exciting, risky, or thrilling*. They involve stealth, danger, speed, agility, deception, or power. People lacking self-control therefore tend to be adventuresome, active, and physical. Those with high levels of self-control tend to be cautious, cognitive, and verbal.

Crimes provide *few or meager long-term benefits*. They are not equivalent to a job or a career. On the contrary, crimes interfere with long-term commitments to jobs, marriages, family, or friends. People with low self-control thus tend to have unstable marriages, friendships, and job profiles. They tend to be little interested in and unprepared for long-term occupation pursuits.

Crimes require *little skill or planning*. The cognitive requirements for most crimes are minimal. It follows that people lacking self-control need not possess or value cognitive or academic skills. The manual skills required for most crimes are minimal. It follows that people lacking self-control need not possess manual skills that require training or apprenticeship.

Crimes often result in *pain or discomfort for the victim*. Property is lost, bodies are injured, privacy is violated, trust is broken. It follows that people with low self-control tend to be self-centered, indifferent, or insensitive to the suffering and needs of others. It does not follow, however, that people with low self-control are routinely unkind or anti-social. On the contrary, they may discover the immediate and easy rewards of charm and generosity.

Recall that crime involves the pursuit of immediate pleasure. It follows that people lacking self-control will also tend to pursue immediate pleasures that are *not* criminal: They will tend to smoke, drink, use drugs, gamble, have children out of wedlock, and engage in illicit sex.

Crimes require the interaction of an offender with people or their property. It does not follow that people lacking self-control will tend to be gregarious or social. However, it does follow that, other things being equal, gregarious or social people are more likely to be involved in criminal acts.

The major benefit of many crimes is not pleasure but relief from momentary irritation. The

irritation caused by a crying child is often the stimulus for physical abuse. That caused by a taunting stranger in a bar is often the stimulus for aggravated assault. It follows that people with low self-control tend to have minimal tolerance for frustration and little ability to respond to conflict through verbal rather than physical means.

Crimes involve the risk of violence and physical injury, of pain and suffering on the part of the offender. It does not follow that people with low self-control will tend to be tolerant of physical pain or to be indifferent to physical discomfort. It does follow that people tolerant of physical pain or indifferent to physical discomfort will be more likely to engage in criminal acts whatever their level of self-control.

The risk of criminal penalty for any given criminal act is small, but this depends in part on the circumstances of the offense. Thus, for example, not all joyrides by teenagers are equally likely to result in arrest. A car stolen from a neighbor and returned unharmed before he notices its absence is less likely to result in official notice than is a car stolen from a shopping center parking lot and abandoned at the convenience of the offender. Drinking alcohol stolen from parents and consumed in the family garage is less likely to receive official notice than drinking in the parking lot outside a concert hall. It follows that offenses differ in their validity as measures of self-control: those offenses with large risk of public awareness are better measures than those with little risk.

In sum, people who lack self-control will tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, short sighted, and non-verbal, and they will tend therefore to engage in criminal and analogous acts. Since these traits can be identified prior to the age of responsibility for crime, since there is considerable tendency for these traits to come together in the same people, and since the traits tend to persist through life, it seems reasonable to consider them as comprising a stable construct useful in the explanation of crime.

The Many Manifestations of Low Self-Control

Our image of the "offender" suggests that crime is not an automatic or necessary consequence of low self-control. It suggests that many noncriminal acts analogous to crime (such as accidents, smoking, and alcohol use) are also manifestations of low self-control. Our image therefore implies that no specific act, type of crime, or form of deviance is uniquely required by the absence of self-control.

Because both crime and analogous behaviors stem from low self-control (that is, both are manifestations of low self-control), they will all be engaged in at a relatively high rate by people with low self-control. Within the domain of crime, then, there will be much versatility among offenders in the criminal acts in which they engage.

Research on the versatility of deviant acts supports these predictions in the strongest possible way. The variety of manifestations of low self-control is immense. In spite of years of tireless research motivated by a belief in specialization, no credible evidence of specialization has been reported. In fact, the evidence of offender versatility is overwhelming (Hirschi 1969; Hindelang 1971; Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972; Petersilia 1980; Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981; Rojek and Erickson 1982; Klein 1984).

By versatility we mean that offenders commit a wide variety of criminal acts, with no strong inclination to pursue a specific criminal act or a pattern of criminal acts to the exclusion of others. Most theories suggest that offenders tend to specialize, whereby such terms as robber, burglar, drug dealer, rapist, and murderer have predictive or descriptive import. In fact, some theories create offender specialization as part of their explanation of crime. For example, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) create distinctive subcultures of delinquency around particular forms of criminal behavior, identifying subcultures specializing in theft, violence, or drugs. In a related way, books are written about white-collar crime as though it were a clearly distinct specialty requiring

a unique explanation. Research projects are undertaken for the study of drug use, or vandalism, or teen pregnancy (as though every study of delinquency were not a study of drug use and vandalism and teenage sexual behavior). Entire schools of criminology emerge to pursue patterning, sequencing, progression, escalation, onset, persistence, and desistance in the career of offenses or offenders. These efforts survive largely because their proponents fail to consider or acknowledge the clear evidence to the contrary. Other reasons for survival of such ideas may be found in the interest of politicians and members of the law enforcement community who see policy potential in criminal careers or "career criminals" (see, e.g., Blumstein et al. 1986).

Occasional reports of specialization seem to contradict this point, as do everyday observations of repetitive misbehavior by particular offenders. Some offenders rob the same store repeatedly over a period of years, or an offender commits several rapes over a (brief) period of time. Such offenders may be called "robbers" or "rapists." However, it should be noted that such labels are retrospective rather than predictive and that they typically ignore a large amount of delinquent or criminal behavior by the same offenders that is inconsistent with their alleged specialty. Thus, for example, the "rapist" will tend also to use drugs, to commit robberies and burglaries (often in concert with the rape), and to have a record for violent offenses other than rape. There is a perhaps natural tendency on the part of observers (and in official accounts) to focus on the most serious crimes in a series of events, but this tendency should not be confused with a tendency on the part of the offender to specialize in one kind of crime.

Recall that one of the defining features of crime is that it is simple and easy. Some apparent specialization will therefore occur because obvious opportunities for an easy score will tend to repeat themselves. An offender who lives next to a shopping area that is approached by pedestrians will have repeat opportunities for purse snatching, and this may show in his arrest record. But even here the specific "criminal career" will tend

to quickly run its course and to be followed by offenses whose content and character is likewise determined by coincidence and opportunity (which is the reason why some form of theft is always the best bet about what a person is likely to do next).

The evidence that offenders are likely to engage in noncriminal acts psychologically or theoretically equivalent to crime is, because of the relatively high rates of these "noncriminal" acts, even easier to document. Thieves are likely to smoke, drink, and skip school at considerably higher rates than nonthieves. Offenders are considerably more likely than nonoffenders to be involved in most types of accidents, including household fires, auto crashes, and unwanted pregnancies. They are also considerably more likely to die at an early age (see, e.g. Robins 1966; Eysenck 1977; Gottfredson 1984).

Good research on drug use and abuse routinely reveals that the correlates of delinquency and drug use are the same. As Akers (1984) has noted,

compared to the abstaining teenager, the drinking, smoking and drug-taking teen is much more likely to be getting into fights, stealing, hurting other people, and committing other delinquencies.

Akers goes on to say, "but the variation in the order in which they take up these things leaves little basis for proposing the causation of one by the other." In our view, the relation between drug use and delinquency is not a causal question. The correlates are the same because drug use and delinquency are both manifestations of an underlying tendency to pursue short-term, immediate pleasure. This underlying tendency (i.e., lack of self control) has many manifestations, as listed by Harrison Gough (1948):

unconcern over the rights and privileges of others when recognizing them would interfere with personal satisfaction in any way; impulsive behavior, or apparent incongruity between the strength of the stimulus and the magnitude of the behavioral response; inability to form deep or persistent attachments to

other persons or to identify in interpersonal relationships; poor judgment and planning in attaining defined goals; apparent lack of anxiety and distress over social maladjustment and unwillingness or inability to consider maladjustment qua maladjustment; a tendency to project blame onto others and to take no responsibility for failures; meaningless prevarication, often about trivial matters in situations where detection is inevitable; almost complete lack of dependability . . . and willingness to assume responsibility; and, finally, emotional poverty. [p. 362]

This combination of characteristics has been revealed in the life histories of the subjects in the famous studies by Lee Robins. Robins is one of the few researchers to focus on the varieties of deviance and the way they tend to go together in the lives of those she designates as having "antisocial personalities." In her words:

We refer to someone who fails to maintain close personal relationships with anyone else, [who] performs poorly on the job, who is involved in illegal behaviors (whether or not apprehended), who fails to support himself and his dependents without outside aid, and who is given to sudden changes of plan and loss of temper in response to what appear to others as minor frustrations. (1978: 255)

For 30 years Robins traced 524 children referred to a guidance clinic in St. Louis, Missouri, and she compared them to a control group matched on IQ, age, sex, and area of the city. She discovered that, in comparison to the control group, those people referred at an early age were more likely to be arrested as adults (for a wide variety of offences), were less likely to get married, were more likely to be divorced, were more likely to marry a spouse with a behavior problem, were less likely to have children (but if they had children were likely to have more children), were more likely to have children with behavior problems, were more likely to be unemployed, had considerably more frequent job

changes, were more likely to be on welfare, had fewer contacts with relatives, had fewer friends, were substantially less likely to attend church, were less likely to serve in the armed forces and more likely to be dishonorably discharged if they did serve, were more likely to exhibit physical evidence of excessive alcohol use, and were more likely to be hospitalized for psychiatric problems (1966: 42–73).

Note that these outcomes are consistent with four general elements of our notion of low self-control: basic stability of individual differences over a long period of time; great variability in the kinds of criminal acts engaged in; conceptual or causal equivalence of criminal and noncriminal acts; and inability to predict the specific forms of deviance engaged in, whether criminal or noncriminal. In our view, the idea of an antisocial personality defined by certain behavioral consequences is too positivistic or deterministic, suggesting that the offender must do certain things given his antisocial personality. Thus we would say only that the subjects in question are *more likely* to commit criminal acts (as the data indicate they are). We do not make commission of criminal acts part of the definition of the individual with low self-control.

Be this as it may, Robins's retrospective research shows that predictions derived from a concept of antisocial personality are highly consistent with the results of prospective longitudinal and cross-sectional research: offenders do not specialize; they tend to be involved in accidents, illness, and death at higher rates than the general population; they tend to have difficulty persisting in a job regardless of the particular characteristics of the job (no job will turn out to be a good job); they have difficulty acquiring and retaining friends; and they have difficulty meeting the demands of long-term financial commitments (such as mortgages or car payments) and the demands of parenting.

Seen in this light, the "costs" of low self-control for the individual may far exceed the costs of his criminal acts. In fact, it appears that crime is

often among the least serious consequences of a lack of self-control in terms of the quality of life of those lacking it.

The Causes of Self-Control

We know better what deficiencies in self-control lead to than where they come from. One thing is, however, clear: low self-control is not produced by training, tutelage, or socialization. As a matter of fact, all of the characteristics associated with low self-control tend to show themselves in the absence of nurturance, discipline, or training. Given the classical appreciation of the causes of human behavior, the implications of this fact are straightforward: the causes of low self-control are negative rather than positive; self-control is unlikely in the absence of effort, intended or unintended, to create it. (This assumption separates the present theory from most modern theories of crime, where the offender is automatically seen as a product of possessive forces, a creature of learning, particular pressures, or specific defect. We will return to this comparison once our theory has been fully explicated.)

At this point it would be easy to construct a theory of crime causation, according to which characteristics of potential offenders lead them ineluctably to the commission of criminal acts. Our task at this point would simply be to identify the likely sources of impulsiveness, intelligence, risk-taking, and the like. But to do so would be to follow the path that has proven so unproductive in the past, the path according to which criminals commit crimes irrespective of the characteristics of the setting or situation.

We can avoid this pitfall by recalling the elements inherent in the decision to commit a criminal act. The object of the offense is clearly pleasurable, and universally so. Engaging in the act, however, entails some risk of social, legal, and/or natural sanctions. Whereas the pleasure attained by the act is direct, obvious, and immediate, the pains risked by it are not obvious,

or direct, and are in any event at greater remove from it. It follows that, though there will be little variability among people in their ability to see the pleasures of crime, there will be considerable variability in their ability to calculate potential pains. But the problem goes further than this: whereas the pleasures of crime are reasonably equally distributed over the population, this is not true for the pains. Everyone appreciates money; not everyone dreads parental anger or disappointment upon learning that the money was stolen.

So, the dimensions of self-control are, in our view, factors affecting calculation of the consequences of one's acts. The impulsive or shortsighted person fails to consider the negative or painful consequences of his acts; the insensitive person has fewer negative consequences to consider; the less intelligent person also has fewer negative consequences to consider (has less to lose).

No known social group, whether criminal or noncriminal, actively or purposefully attempts to reduce the self-control of its members. Social life is not enhanced by low self-control and its consequences. On the contrary, the exhibition of these tendencies undermines harmonious group relations and the ability to achieve collective ends. These facts explicitly deny that a tendency to crime is a product of socialization, culture, or positive learning of any sort.

The traits composing low self-control are also not conducive to the achievement of long-term individual goals. On the contrary, they impede educational and occupational achievement, destroy interpersonal relations, and undermine physical health and economic well-being. Such facts explicitly deny the notion that criminality is an alternative route to the goals otherwise obtainable through legitimate avenues. It follows that people who care about the interpersonal skill, educational and occupational achievement, and physical and economic well-being of those in their care will seek to rid them of these traits.

Two general sources of variation are immediately apparent in this scheme. The first is the variation among children in the degree to which they manifest such traits to begin with. The second is the variation among caretakers in the degree to which they recognize low self-control and its consequences and the degree to which they are willing and able to correct it. Obviously, therefore, even at this threshold level the sources of low self-control are complex.

There is good evidence that some of the traits predicting subsequent involvement in crime appear as early as they can be reliably measured, including low intelligence, high activity level, physical strength, and adventuresomeness (Glueck and Glueck 1950; West and Farrington 1973). The evidence suggests that the connection between these traits and commission of criminal acts ranges from weak to moderate. Obviously, we do not suggest that people are born criminals, inherit a gene for criminality, or anything of the sort. In fact, we explicitly deny such notions What we do suggest is that individual differences may have an impact on the prospects for effective socialization (or adequate control). Effective socialization is, however, always possible whatever the configuration of individual traits.

Other traits affecting crime appear later and seem to be largely products of ineffective or incomplete socialization. For example, differences in impulsivity and insensitivity become noticeable later in childhood when they are no longer common to all children. The ability and willingness to delay immediate gratification for some larger purpose may therefore be assumed to be a consequence of training. Much parental action is in fact geared toward suppression of impulsive behavior, toward making the child consider the long-range consequences of acts. Consistent sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others may also be assumed to be a consequence of training. Indeed, much parental behavior is directed toward teaching the child about the rights and feelings of others, and of how these rights and

feelings ought to constrain the child's behavior. All of these points focus our attention on child-rearing.

Child-Rearing and Self-Control: The Family

The major "cause" of low self-control thus appears to be ineffective child-rearing. Put in positive terms, several conditions appear necessary to produce a socialized child. Perhaps the place to begin looking for these conditions is the research literature on the relation between family conditions and delinquency. This research (e.g., Glueck and Glueck 1950; McCord and McCord 1959) has examined the connection between many family factors and delinquency. It reports that discipline, supervision, and affection tend to be missing in the homes of delinquents, that the behavior of the parents is often "poor" (e.g., excessive drinking and poor supervision [Glueck and Glueck 1950: 110–11]), and that the parents of delinquents are unusually likely to have criminal records themselves. Indeed, according to Michael Rutter and Henri Giller, "of the parental characteristics associated with delinquency, criminality is the most striking and most consistent" (1984: 182).

Such information undermines the many explanations of crime that ignore the family, but in this form it does not represent much of an advance over the belief of the general public (and those who deal with offenders in the criminal justice system) that "defective upbringing" or "neglect" in the home is the primary cause of crime.

To put these standard research findings in perspective, we think it necessary to define the conditions necessary for adequate child-rearing to occur. The minimum conditions seem to be these: in order to teach the child self-control, someone must (1) monitor the child's behavior; (2) recognize deviant behavior when it occurs; and (3) punish such behavior. This seems simple and obvious enough. All that is required to activate the system is affection for *or* investment in the child. The person who cares for the child

will watch his behavior, see him doing things he should not do, and correct him. The result may be a child more capable of delaying gratification, more sensitive to the interests and desires of others, more independent, more willing to accept restraints on his activity, and more unlikely to use force or violence to attain his ends.

When we seek the causes of low self-control, we ask where this system can go wrong. Obviously, parents do not prefer their children to be unsocialized in the terms described. We can therefore rule out in advance the possibility of positive socialization to unsocialized behavior (as cultural or subcultural deviance theories suggest). Still, the system can go wrong at any one of four places. First, the parents may not care for the child (in which case none of the other conditions would be met); second, the parents, even if they care, may not have the time or energy to monitor the child's behavior; third, the parents, even if they care *and* monitor, may not see anything wrong with the child's behavior; finally, even if everything else is in place, the parents may not have the inclination or the means to punish the child. So, what may appear at first glance to be nonproblematic turns out to be problematic indeed. Many things can go wrong. According to much research in crime and delinquency, in the homes of problem children many things have gone wrong: "Parents of stealers do not track ([they] do not interpret stealing . . . as 'deviant'); they do not punish; and they do not care" (Patterson 1980: 88–89; see also Glueck and Glueck 1950; McCord and McCord 1959; West and Farrington 1977).

Let us apply this scheme to some of the facts about the connection between child socialization and crime, beginning with the elements of the child-rearing model.

The Attachment of the Parent to the Child

Our model states that parental concern for the welfare or behavior of the child is a necessary condition for successful child-rearing. Because it is too often assumed that all parents are alike

in their love for their children, the evidence directly on this point is not as good or extensive as it could be. However, what exists is clearly consistent with the model. Glueck and Glueck (1950: 125–28) report that, compared to the fathers of delinquents, fathers of nondelinquents were twice as likely to be warmly disposed toward their sons and one-fifth as likely to be hostile toward them. In the same sample, 28 percent of the mothers of delinquents were characterized as "indifferent or hostile" toward the child as compared to 4 percent of the mothers of nondelinquents. The evidence suggests that stepparents are especially unlikely to have feelings of affection toward their stepchildren (Burgess 1980), adding in contemporary society to the likelihood that children will be "reared" by people who do not especially care for them.

Parental Supervision

The connection between social control and self-control could not be more direct than in the case of parental supervision of the child. Such supervision presumably prevents criminal or analogous acts and at the same time trains the child to avoid them on his own. Consistent with this assumption, supervision tends to be a major predictor of delinquency, however supervision or delinquency is measured (Glueck and Glueck 1950; Hirschi 1969; West and Farrington 1977; Riley and Shaw 1985).

Our general theory in principle provides a method of separating supervision as external control from supervision as internal control. For one thing, offenses differ in the degree to which they can be prevented through monitoring; children at one age are monitored much more closely than children at other ages; girls are supervised more closely than boys. In some situations, monitoring is universal or nearly constant; in other situations monitoring for some offenses is virtually absent. In the present context, however, the concern is with the connection between supervision and self-control, a connection established by the stronger tendency of those poorly supervised when young to commit crimes as adults (McCord 1979).

Recognition of Deviant Behavior

In order for supervision to have an impact on self-control, the supervisor must perceive deviant behavior when it occurs. Remarkably, not all parents are adept at recognizing lack of self-control. Some parents allow the child to do pretty much as he pleases without interference. Extensive television-viewing is one modern example, as is the failure to require completion of homework, to prohibit smoking, to curtail the use of physical force, or to see to it that the child actually attends school. (As noted, truancy among second-graders presumably reflects on the adequacy of parental awareness of the child's misbehavior.) Again, the research is not as good as it should be, but evidence of "poor conduct standards" in the homes of delinquents is common.

Punishment of Deviant Acts

Control theories explicitly acknowledge the necessity of sanctions in preventing criminal behavior. They do not suggest that the major sanctions are legal or corporal. On the contrary, as we have seen, they suggest that disapproval by people one cares about is the most powerful of sanctions. Effective punishment by the parent or major caretaker therefore usually entails nothing more than explicit disapproval of unwanted behavior. The criticism of control theories that dwells on their alleged cruelty is therefore simply misguided or ill informed (see, e.g., Currie 1985).

Not all caretakers punish effectively. In fact, some are too harsh and some are too lenient (Glueck and Glueck 1950; McCord and McCord 1959; West and Farrington 1977; see generally Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). Given our model, however, rewarding good behavior cannot compensate for failure to correct deviant behavior. (Recall that, in our view, deviant acts carry with them their own rewards)

Given the consistency of the child-rearing model with our general theory and with the research literature, it should be possible to use it to explain other family correlates of criminal and otherwise deviant behavior.

Parental Criminality

Our theory focuses on the connection between the self-control of the parent and the subsequent self-control of the child. There is good reason to expect, and the data confirm, that people lacking self-control do not socialize their children well. According to Donald West and David Farrington, "the fact that delinquency is transmitted from one generation to the next is indisputable" (1977: 109; see also Robins 1966). Of course our theory does not allow transmission of criminality, genetic or otherwise. However, it does allow us to predict that some people are more likely than others to fail to socialize their children and that this will be a consequence of their own inadequate socialization. The extent of this connection between parent and child socialization is revealed by the fact that in the West and Farrington study fewer than 5 percent of the families accounted for almost half of the criminal convictions in the entire sample. (In our view, this finding is more important for the theory of crime, and for public policy, than the much better-known finding of Wolfgang and his colleagues [1972] that something like 6 percent of *individual* offenders account for about half of all criminal acts.) In order to achieve such concentration of crime in a small number of families, it is necessary that the parents and the brothers and sisters of offenders also be unusually likely to commit criminal acts.

Why should the children of offenders be unusually vulnerable to crime? Recall that our theory assumes that criminality is not something the parents have to work to produce; on the contrary, it assumes that criminality is something they have to work to avoid. Consistent with this view, parents with criminal records do *not* encourage crime in their children and are in fact as disapproving of it as parents with no record of criminal involvement (West and Farrington 1977). Of course, not wanting criminal behavior in one's children and being upset when it occurs do not necessarily imply that great effort has been expended to prevent

it. If criminal behavior is oriented toward short-term rewards, and if child-rearing is oriented toward long-term rewards, there is little reason to expect parents themselves lacking self-control to be particularly adept at instilling self-control in their children.

Consistent with this expectation, research consistently indicates that the supervision of delinquents in families where parents have criminal records tends to be “lax,” “inadequate,” or “poor.” Punishment in these families also tends to be easy, short-term, and insensitive—that is, yelling and screaming, slapping and hitting, with threats that are not carried out.

Such facts do not, however, completely account for the concentration of criminality among some families. A major reason for this failure is probably that the most subtle element

of child-rearing is not included in the analysis. This is the element of *recognition* of deviant behavior. According to Gerald Patterson (1980), many parents do not even recognize *criminal* behavior in their children, let alone the minor forms of deviance whose punishment is necessary for effective child-rearing. For example, when children steal outside the home, some parents discount reports that they have done so on the grounds that the charges are unproved and cannot therefore be used to justify punishment. By the same token, when children are suspended for misbehavior at school, some parents side with the child and blame the episode on prejudicial mistreatment by teachers. Obviously, parents who cannot see the misbehavior of their children are in no position to correct it, even if they are inclined to do so. . . .

Discussion Questions

1. What is low self-control? What are its main elements?
2. Give examples of acts that are “analogous” to crime. Why do Gottfredson and Hirschi believe that low self-control explains both crime and these analogous acts?
3. How does Gottfredson and Hirschi’s self-control theory differ from Hirschi’s earlier social bond theory?
4. What is the main reason that people have low self-control? In turn, based on Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory, what would be the best way to try to reduce crime?