THE COMPLEXITY OF CONTROL
Hirschi's Two Theories and Beyond

Travis Hirschi has dominated control theory for four decades. His influence today is undiminished and likely will continue for years, if not decades, to come (see, e.g., Britt & Costello, 2015; Britt & Gottfredson, 2003; Costello, 2013; Gottfredson, 2006; Hay & Meldrum, 2016; Kempf, 1993; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Vazsonyi, Mikuška, & Kelley, 2017). Beyond the sheer scholarly talent manifested in his writings, what accounts for Hirschi's enduring influence on criminological theory? Three interrelated considerations appear to nourish the appeal of his thinking.

First, Hirschi's theories are stated parsimoniously. This means that his theories' core propositions are easily understood (e.g., the lack of social bonds or of self-control increases criminal involvement). Second, Hirschi is combative and thus controversial. He stakes out a theoretical position and then argues that alternative perspectives are wrong. Hirschi (1983) has long been antagonistic to attempts to integrate theories. Good theories, he believes, have assumptions and an internal consistency that make them incompatible with other approaches. Attempts to mix them together result in fuzzy conceptual frameworks and inhibit the growth of the individual theories. Third, because Hirschi's theories are parsimoniously stated and make claims that other theories are wrong, they are ideal to test empirically. One (but not the only) reason that theories flourish is that they are able to provide scholars with opportunities to conduct research and gain publication—the very accomplishment that allows for tenure and career advancement (Cole, 1975). Hirschi's theorizing has thus been a rich resource that criminologists have mined for numerous publications (Gottfredson, 2006; Kempf, 1993; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Sampson & Laub, 1993). There is little evidence that this vein of research ideas will soon run dry.

This is not to say that Hirschi's theorizing has been universally popular. His frameworks are bold—critics would say pretentious (Geis, 2000)—because they claim to be "general theories" that explain crime across types of crime and types of people. Hirschi also has shown little interest in race, class, and gender inequalities that others—especially those from more critical perspectives—see as fundamental to any explanation of crime (see, e.g., Miller & Burack, 1993). Regardless of their merits, these critiques have done little to dim Hirschi's influence; if anything, the controversy has sparked further research (see, e.g., Blackwell & Piquero, 2005).

In his career, Hirschi's thinking has evolved rather substantially. In fact, he has proposed two related but ultimately competing theories. The first perspective, *social bond theory*, was presented in

Steve Agan Photography

Travis Hirschi
1935–2017
University of Arizona
Author of Social Bond Theory

1969 in his book *Causes of Delinquency*. The second perspective, *self-control theory*, was presented in 1990 in his book *A General Theory of Crime*—a work he coauthored with Michael Gottfredson. In this chapter, we review each theory and attempt to show how they are best considered rival theoretical perspectives. We also consider Schreck's efforts to expand self-control theory to explain *victimization*.

Hirschi's pervasive influence, however, should not mask the theoretical contributions of other scholars who have focused on the role of control in crime causation. In many ways, these alternative theories are richer in that they explore more carefully how control is shaped by context and can have diverse consequences. In short, they illuminate the *complexity of control*. Accordingly, we review three important contemporary control theories: Hagan's *power-control theory*, Tittle's *control balance theory*, and Colvin's *coercion theory*. We also consider Cullen's *social support theory*, which attempts to move beyond a pure control theory of crime.

HIRSCHI'S FIRST THEORY: SOCIAL BONDS AND DELINQUENCY

The central premise of Hirschi's first theory is that delinquency arises when social bonds are weak or absent. By itself, this proposition seems rather technical and not something that would stir much theoretical controversy. But Hirschi's intent was not simply to identify another variety of control theory—his *social bond theory*—but in doing so to challenge the two major paradigms of his day: Sutherland's differential association theory (which he termed cultural deviance theory) and Merton's strain theory. His goal was to start a theoretical fight; he succeeded (see also Kornhauser, 1978).

Again, as a control theorist, he argued that these two perspectives asked the wrong theoretical question: Why are people motivated to commit crimes? For differential association theory, the answer was that youths are enveloped by a deviant culture that they learn in interaction with others. This positive learning—that is, learning to value crime—is what moves them to break the law. For strain theory, the blockage of goals creates a frustration that is the engine that drives individuals into crime. Hirschi, however, asserted that these theories were explaining something that did not require explanation—*motivation*. If humans would by their natures seek the easy and immediate gratifications inherent in crime, then they did not need to learn to want to commit crimes or be driven into crime by unbearable strains in order to break the law. In effect, such criminal cultural values and strains were redundant and thus did not explain who would be a delinquent and who would not be a delinquent.

For Hirschi, of course, the proper theoretical question was: Why *don't* people break the law? What differentiates offenders from nonoffenders are the factors that *restrain* people from acting on their wayward impulses. The theoretical task thus was to identify the nature of the social controls that regulate when crime occurs. Hirschi (1969) called these controls "social bonds."

Hirschi's Forerunners

Hirschi's (1969) theoretical position was expressed with special clarity through a critique of alternative perspectives, an exploration of the differences between his own formulation and those of his predecessors in the development of control theory, and an examination of his position in the light of empirical data. A review of his approach may provide a clear example not only of the way in which criminological theories reflect contexts of time and place but also of the manner in which they are shaped by special considerations aside from the orientations of the particular theorists. Hirschi himself showed an appreciation of this and unusual candor in admitting just how certain considerations affected the way in which he set forth his position. These included the nature of the data available to him and the current unpopularity of one specific tradition through which he might have expressed his ideas—the social disorganization theme of the Chicago school.

Hirschi pointed out the significance of the data factor in an interview:

Control theory, as I stated it, cannot really be understood unless one takes into account the fact that I was attached to a particular method of research. When I was working on the theory, I knew that my data were going to be survey data; therefore, I knew that I was going to have mainly the perceptions, attitudes, and values of individuals as reported by them. . . . Had I data on other people or on the structure of the community, I would have had to state the theory *in a quite different way*. (quoted in Bartollas, 1985, p. 190, emphasis added)

The problem with the social disorganization theme was that it had lost a great deal of its popularity as an explanation of social problems in general and of crime in particular (Rubington & Weinberg, 1971). Like the older concept of *social pathology*, it had come under intense criticism as a matter of vague generalities masking a lack of value neutrality. As Clinard (1957) commented:

There are a number of objections to this frame of reference. (1) Disorganization is too subjective and vague a concept for analyzing a general society. . . . (2) Social disorganization implies the disruption of a previously existing condition of organization, a situation which generally cannot be established. . . . (3) Social disorganization is usually thought of as something "bad," and what is "bad" is often the value judgment of the observer and the members of his social class or other social groups. . . . (4) The existence of forms of deviant behavior does not necessarily constitute a major threat to the central values of a society. . . . (5) What seems like disorganization actually may often be highly organized systems of competing norms. . . . (6) Finally, as several sociologists have suggested, it is possible that a variety of subcultures may contribute, through their diversity, to the unity or integration of a society rather than weakening it by constituting a situation of social disorganization. (p. 41)

These and other criticisms of the concept of social disorganization were widely accepted during the 1960s, and Hirschi was equally candid in describing how he deliberately avoided linking his theory to the social disorganization tradition because of its unpopularity at the time:

For example, I was aware at the time I wrote my theory that it was well within the social disorganization tradition. I knew that, but you have to remember the status of social disorganization as a concept in the middle 1960s when I was writing. I felt I was swimming against the current in stating a social control theory at the individual level. Had I tried to sell social disorganization at the same time, I would have been in deep trouble. So I shied away from that tradition. As a result, I did not give social disorganization its due. I went back to Durkheim and Hobbes and ignored an entire American tradition that was directly relevant to what I was saying. But I was aware of it and took comfort in it. I said the same things the social disorganization people had said, but since they had fallen into disfavor I had to disassociate myself from them. Further, as Ruth Kornhauser so acutely points out, social disorganization theories had been associated with the cultural tradition. That was the tradition I was working hardest against; so in that sense, I have compromised my own position or I would have introduced a lot of debate I didn't want to get into had I dealt explicitly with social disorganization theory. Now, with people like Kornhauser on my side and social disorganization back in vogue, I would emphasize my roots in this illustrious tradition. (quoted in Bartollas, 1985, p. 190)

So, Hirschi (1969) was especially careful to avoid working explicitly out of the social disorganization tradition and to ground his position instead in the thought of other forerunners such as Durkheim and Hobbes. Concentrating on a search for the essential variables providing control through bonds to conventional society, he developed his own position and presented a body of systematic research in support of it. This combination seemed to represent the epitome of tightly reasoned and empirically grounded control theory.

Hirschi's Sociological Perspective

The control theorists examined to this point tended to distinguish between control exerted from sources external to the individual and control exerted from within the individual. Indeed, Reckless (1961) argued that the individual is so isolated in contemporary society—so free to move from one context of external control to another or even to escape from most of it—that internal control is the more basic factor in conformity. Hirschi's position was much more sociological in nature. The characteristics that other control theorists took to be aspects of the personality were considered by Hirschi to be factors sustained by ongoing social relationships that he termed *social bonds*.

Other control theorists gave great weight to the notion of *internalization*, the process by which social norms are taken so deeply into the self as to become a fundamental part of the personality structure. Citing Wrong's (1961) critique of this "over-socialized conception of man," Hirschi (1969, p. 4) insisted instead that what seems to be deeply rooted internalization of social expectations actually is much too superficial to guarantee conformity. First, he rescued Durkheim from the strain theorists. Pointing out that "because Merton traces his intellectual history to Durkheim, strain theories are often called 'anomie' theories," Hirschi (1969) showed that "actually, Durkheim's theory is one of the purest examples of control theory" (p. 3). Next he turned to the question posed by Hobbes—"Why do men obey the rules of society?"—observing that an assumption of internalization commonly was used as a means of avoiding Hobbes's own conclusion that conformity was based essentially on fear. Here there was an echo of Reiss's distinction between conformity resulting from acceptance of the rules and conformity based on mere *submission*.

This willingness to acknowledge that conformity might be based on simple submission to the forces of social regulation without internalized acceptance of the norms became fairly clear in Hirschi's first citation of Durkheim as a control theorist. Hirschi (1969) remarked that "both anomie and egoism are conditions of 'deregulation,' and the 'aberrant' behavior that follows is an automatic consequence of such deregulation" (p. 3); he made this remark without noting Durkheim's complementary stress on integration as a factor in conformity. Turning immediately to Hobbes, he put the matter with stark clarity as follows:

> Although the Hobbesian question is granted a central place in the history of sociological theory, few have accepted the Hobbesian answer. . . . It is not so, the sociologist argued: There is more to conformity than fear. Man has an "attitude of respect" toward the rules of society; he "internalizes the norms." Since man has a conscience, he is not free simply to calculate the costs of illegal or deviant behavior. . . .
>
> Having thus established that man is a moral animal who desires to obey the rules, the sociologist was then faced with the problem of explaining his deviance. (p. 5)

For Hirschi (1969), then, the problem of explaining deviance was a false problem based on the mistaken assumption that people are fundamentally moral as a result of having internalized norms during socialization. He insisted, however, that it was an "oversimplification" to say that "strain theory assumes a moral man while control theory assumes an amoral man" because the latter "merely assumes variation in morality: For some men, considerations of morality are important,

for others they are not" (p. 11). Unlike Matza, who believed that it was necessary to suggest forces of preparation and desperation as a way of explaining why the mere loss of control might result in delinquency, Hirschi suggested no motivational factors and simply noted that loss of control sets the individual free to calculate the costs of crime. "Because his perspective allows him to free some men from moral sensitivities, the control theorist is likely to shift to a second line of social control—to the rational calculational component in conformity and deviation" (p. 11).

Why Social Control Matters

Again, Hirschi was a control theorist who believed that the key issue is to explain why people, all of whom are motivated to seek immediate gratification in the easiest way possible, refrain from doing so. Why don't they do it? Why don't they commit crimes to get what they want?

Here is another way of putting this issue. Hirschi believed that each potential criminal act has benefits and consequences (also called costs). In his view, most people in society see pretty much the same benefits in crime, because such acts allow them to get what they want (e.g., take something), feel something they like (e.g., get high on drugs), or stop something they find unpleasant (e.g., hit someone aggravating them) (Marcus, 2004). Importantly, Hirschi never showed *empirically* that people see the same benefits in crime; he just assumed this to be the case. However, this is a key assumption.

If most people see crime as having the same benefits—that is, if crime is gratifying or tempting to most people—then it logically follows that most people are *equally motivated to offend*. As noted, other criminological theories dispute the equal motivation thesis; in fact, they spend a great amount of time explaining why some individuals are more motivated to offend than others (e.g., they are under more strain; they have internalized criminal values). But if we assume, as did Hirschi, that motivation to offend is universal, then motivation cannot explain who is or is not a criminal.

Think of this issue methodologically. An independent variable—in this case motivation to offend—has to *vary* if it is to explain *variation in the dependent variable*—in this case involvement in criminal conduct. What, then, does vary? Of course, it is social control. Thus, for Hirschi, *variation in the strength of social control is what explains variation in the extent to which people engage in crime*.

Importantly, Hirschi did not just emphasize control but rather *social* control. As noted, he set forth a sociological theory of crime. Control did not reside in some psychological trait or permanently entrenched set of beliefs. Instead, for Hirschi, the control resides in a person's *ties to conventional society*—to its adult members (parents, teachers), its institutions (family, school), and its beliefs (laws, normative standards). The control thus lies in a person's *relationship* to society. Hirschi called these different kinds of ties or relationships *social bonds*. He identified four social bonds: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief; these are discussed below in detail.

For Hirschi, *variation in social bonds thus explains variation in crime*. The stronger the bond, the more likely criminal enticements will be controlled and that conformity will ensue; the weaker the bond, the more likely individuals will succumb to their desires and break the law. This returns us, then, to the question, "Why don't they do it?" The answer should be clear: People do not engage in crime—they do not act on their desire for gratification—because they are stopped from doing so by their social bonds. In short, social bonds control their attraction to illegal temptations and ensure their conformity. Much like a dam holding back floodwaters, social bonds keep individuals safe from crime. But if the dam cracks or breaks, then criminal motivations can flood these individuals and no barrier exists to prevent them from offending.

Importantly, the stability of the social bond is not a given. The social bond remains strong only so long as it is nourished by interaction with conventional others. If youngsters become distant from parents, give up on going to college and caring about grades, or are cut from sports teams, their bonds can attenuate. And if bonds weaken, crime can take place. Because bonds can vary in strength across time—for example, weaker in the teenage years, stronger before and after—people can move into and out of illegal conduct. Adult offenders might desist from crime if they enter a

quality marriage or get a good job. In short, the presence and strength of social bonds can explain *change in offending*. As we will see in Chapter 16, this insight forms the basis of Sampson and Laub's (1993) life-course theory, which uses variation in social bonds to explain why people enter and desist from crime across various points in their lives.

Finally, in his social bond model, Hirschi rejected the view of the classical school of criminology and of later rational choice theorists (see Chapter 13) that crime is simply due to a weighing of costs and benefits. As noted, Hirschi saw the choice of crime as involving costs (or consequences) and benefits (or gratifications). But he differed from the classical school in two important ways. First, he did not see the benefits of crime as varying across individuals, as the classical school would, but rather as easily available to everyone.

Second, the cost of crime was not, as the classical school implied, mainly a matter of legal sanctions, such as imprisonment. Although a simplification, the classical school and some rational choice theorists implicitly suggest that people faced with the decision to commit a crime calculate (1) how much money they will get versus (2) their chances of being arrested and sent to jail. For Hirschi, such a position truncates reality. Indeed, Hirschi's delinquents in *Causes of Delinquency* made choices but did so within a rich social environment populated with parents, teachers, homework, grades, school activities, and so on. Only when youths were loosened from the ties that bound them to the conventional order were they free to choose to pursue the benefits crime had to offer. Again, this attention to relationships within social institutions is what made Hirschi's theory fundamentally sociological.

The Four Social Bonds

What, then, are the bonds that form the basis of Hirschi's delinquency theory? They are attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. These social bonds are summarized in Table 6.1.

The Social Bond of Attachment. In Hirschi's delinquency theory, *attachment* is the emotional closeness that youths have with adults, with parents typically being the most important. This

Table 6.1 Summary of Hirschi's Social Bond Theory of Delinquency

Social Bond	Nature of the Social Bond	Nature of Social Control: Why Don't They Do It?
Attachment	Emotional closeness to others, especially parents.	Indirect control—closeness leads youths to care about parents' opinions, including their disapproval of "bad behavior." Youths do not offend because they do not want to disappoint their parents (or others to whom they are attached, such as teachers).
Commitment	High educational and occupational aspirations and good grades in school.	Stake in conformity makes the cost of crime too high. This is thus the rational component of the social bond.
Involvement	Participation in conventional activities, including homework, work, sports, school activities, and other recreational pursuits.	Lack of unstructured or leisure time limits opportunities to offend.
Belief	An embrace of the moral validity of the law and of other conventional norms (e.g., school rules).	Moral beliefs restrain impulses to offend; conversely, crime occurs when such conventional beliefs are weakened.

closeness involves intimate communication, "affectional identification" with parents (i.e., wanting to be like their parents), and a sense that parents know what they are doing and where they are. This bond is rooted in the extent to which children spend time with parents and "interact with them on a personal basis" (Hirschi, 1969, p. 94).

When close to parents, youngsters care about their opinions and do not wish to disappoint them. As a result, parents are able to exercise *indirect control*. Direct control is when parents supervise their offspring while in their presence (e.g., discipline them for misconduct). Indirect control, however, occurs when children are not in the same location—that is, are physically separated from parents. Hirschi (1969) also referred to this as "virtual supervision." Where, then, does the control come from? According to Hirschi, youngsters refrain from offending because their attachment makes parents psychologically present. They do not skip school, vandalize, or take drugs because, as the saying goes, "my parents would kill me." As Hirschi (1969) stated:

> So-called "direct control" is not, except as a limiting case, of much substantive or theoretical importance. The important consideration is whether the parent is psychologically present when temptation to commit 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. (p. 88)

The Social Bond of Commitment. Commitment involves youths' stake in conformity (Briar & Piliavin, 1965). Because they invest so much in school success, for example, they would not want to "blow their future" by doing something wrong. This is the rational component of the social bond because commitment is part of a cost-benefit calculation. Those highly committed would find delinquency irrational to commit. They are thus controlled by this consideration.

Commitment was defined not in terms of a surrender of self-interest but rather as *the degree to which the individual's self-interest has been invested* in a given set of activities. For Hirschi (1969), this was the "rational component of conformity," essentially a matter of the rational calculation of potential gains and losses, so that the individual contemplating a deviant act "must consider the costs of this deviant behavior, the risk he runs of losing the investment he has made in conventional behavior" (p. 20). In this sense, a youth who has invested much time and energy in conforming to the expectations of parents and teachers, working hard, and perhaps graduating with honors has a tighter bond with society because he or she has a powerful "stake in conformity" and much to lose by getting out of line.

Of course, "in order for such a built-in system of regulation to be effective, actors in the system must perceive the connections between deviation and reward and must value the rewards society proposes to withhold as punishment for deviation" (p. 162). Hirschi went on to point out that "the stance taken toward aspirations here is virtually opposite to that taken in strain theories" because in control theory "such aspirations are viewed as constraints on delinquency" (p. 162). Although strain theory tended to see high aspirations as leading to frustration and consequent deviance, Hirschi, like Reckless, maintained that the opposite was true: Legitimate aspirations gave a "stake in conformity" that tied the individual to the conventional social order, at least when he or she had invested in the pursuit of such goals instead of merely wishing for them.

The Social Bond of Involvement. Involvement is, in effect, another way of proposing that denial of access to criminal opportunities makes delinquency less likely. Discussions of Hirschi's theory do not typically frame involvement in terms of opportunity, but it is useful to do so. He is pointing to the fact that structured conventional activities take away chances to offend. This insight is now common in environmental or opportunity theories of crime (see Chapter 13).

Thus, as for involvement as a factor in social control, Hirschi (1969) did not stress the psychological theme of emotional entanglement; rather, he stressed the sociological observation that "many persons undoubtedly owe a life of virtue to a lack of opportunity to do otherwise" (p. 21).

Acknowledging that the old thesis "idle hands are the devil's workshop" and the commonsense suggestion that delinquency could be prevented by keeping young people busy and off the streets had so far found little support in research, he went on to examine the possibility that involvement defined in terms of sheer *amount of time and energy devoted to a given set of activities* might represent a key factor in social control. Aside from findings such as those relating time spent on homework to extent of delinquency, however, Hirschi's data failed to lend much support to the hypothesis that involvement, as he conceptualized it, represented a variable crucial to preventing wayward behavior.

However, more recent data have provided more support to the idea that involvement in conventional activities reduces the opportunity to offend. In 1996, Osgood, Wilson, Bachman, O'Malley, and Johnston made the key insight that activities can be either *structured* or *unstructured*. Structured activities are organized, supervised by adult authority figures, and conducted in prosocial environments. These might include a school athletic team, a church youth group, a tennis lesson, or perhaps a tutoring session. By contrast, unstructured activities are unorganized, unsupervised, and held in settings where trouble might arise. These might include hanging out in a mall, drinking in a park at night, or joyriding.

Research shows that socializing through unstructured activities is associated with criminal conduct (Osgood, 2010). In a study of 700 British "young people" in the Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study, Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie (2012) reported that "the rate of crime is particularly high during unstructured peer-oriented activities" (p. 319). Their analysis also revealed, however, that unstructured activities were especially consequential for "crime-prone" youths who gravitated to "criminogenic settings" (e.g., places with low collective efficacy) (2012, p. 319). Future research thus might profit by exploring the interaction among differences in individual propensity, social settings, and activities.

Another study by Hughes and Short (2014) is similarly illuminating. This project reanalyzed data on 490 boys in Black and White gangs and nongang comparison groups originally studied between 1959 and 1962 by Short and Strodtbeck (1965)—an investigation that yielded their classic book *Group Process and Gang Delinquency*. One value of revisiting data from a different era is to see if causal mechanisms remain constant across time. Consistent with much research, Hughes and Short found that gang membership increases delinquency (see Pyrooz, Turanovic, Decker, & Wu, 2016). But why is this so? They discovered that an important part of the "gang-facilitative effect occurs indirectly through unstructured and unsupervised socializing with peers, including hanging on the streets, riding around in cars, and attending house or quarter parties" (Hughes & Short, 2014, p. 441). Their analysis also revealed that one interactive process that arose when peers were left to their own devices was "signifying," where youths taunt, insult, razz, or "play the dozens" with one another with an audience present. These status contests were a source of fighting, likely an effort to "save face" in front of peers who might well have been egging them on (2014, p. 441).

This finding supports Hirschi's involvement thesis but also shows an important limitation of his theory. Hirschi is correct that lack of involvement frees youths to get into trouble. However, social bond theory assumes only that youngsters will be sufficiently motivated to engage in some kind of delinquency. It does not take up the next step of explaining which youths who are out on their own in unstructured and unsupervised activities are more crime prone—the point addressed by Wikström et al. (2012) discussed above—or take up the situational circumstances, such as gang membership, that might provoke youths just "hanging out" to suddenly start fighting—the point addressed by Hughes and Short (2014). The failure of social bond theory to clarify fully what happens when social bonds, such as involvement, weaken is a significant limitation—but, as noted, it also presents an opportunity for current researchers to explore.

The Social Bond of Belief. Hirschi's (1969) use of the term *belief* also was much more sociological than psychological. He did not use the term to indicate deeply held convictions; rather, he used it to suggest approbation in the sense of assent to certain values and norms with some degree of approval. Used in this way, beliefs are seen not as profoundly internalized personal creeds but

rather as impressions and opinions that are highly dependent on constant social reinforcement. If the degree of approbation is slight, then the belief becomes a matter of simple assent—of a willingness to submit and "go along," at least for the present. If the degree of approbation is greater, then it may amount to a belief to which the individual gives eager approval and wholehearted cooperation. The point is that such beliefs were not taken to be inner states independent of circumstances; instead, they were taken to be somewhat precarious moral positions much in need of social support based on the ongoing attachment to conventional social systems described earlier.

Hirschi (1969) was careful to point out that he was not accepting that approach to control theory in which "beliefs are treated as mere words that mean little or nothing if the other forms of control are missing" (p. 24). He was equally careful to reject the other extreme represented by Sykes and Matza's (1957) insistence that delinquents "believe" in the conventional morality to the extent that techniques of neutralization become necessary before violations can occur. Hirschi (1969) took the position that individuals differ considerably in the depth and power of their beliefs and that this variation is dependent on the degree of attachment to systems representing the beliefs in question. As he put it, "The chain of causation is thus from attachment to parents, through concern for the approval of persons in positions of authority, to belief that the rules of society are binding on one's conduct" (p. 200). In this view, it is not that people lack consciences or that they are, in truth, totally amoral beings who simply babble on about how much they think they "believe in" things. Rather, it is that "attachment to a system and belief in the moral validity of its rules are not independent" (p. 200); what is called *belief* depends on the strength of attachment and will decline with it.

Thus, belief is best seen as *the extent to which adolescents embrace the moral validity of the law and other conventional normative standards*. For Hirschi, youths do not commit crime because, as Sutherland or Akers would suggest, they have learned delinquent values supportive of stealing or fighting. Rather, they know right from wrong. The problem, however, is that wayward youths do not care that much whether something is right or wrong; that is, they lack an allegiance to—or a bond with—conventional laws and rules. Whereas conforming kids obey the law because they respect it and see it as legitimate, delinquent kids have no belief in the moral validity of such standards; thus, their belief in the law is too weak to control their desires to gratify their needs through illegal means. "Control theorists," in Hirschi's (1969) words, are "in agreement on one point (the point which makes them control theorists): delinquency is not caused by beliefs that require delinquency but is rather made possible by the absence of (effective) beliefs that forbid delinquency" (p. 198).

This issue of belief is critical in understanding the long-standing feud between differential association/social learning theory and control theory. Recall that Travis Hirschi and Ronald Akers both started their careers on the same sociology faculty at the University of Washington. They have had cordial personal relations for the past four decades. Nonetheless, during these years they have been archrivals theoretically (Akers, 2011). The crux of the argument is that Akers asserts that beliefs or definitions favorable to crime can be learned and lead people to offend. That is, individuals offend because they are *socialized to embrace criminal cultural* beliefs. By contrast, Hirschi asserts that such "cultural deviance" is a myth (see also Kornhauser, 1978). He denies that any *positive learning* is needed to commit crime. That is, youths—or adults—do not need to learn *criminal beliefs* and skills because (1) as gratification-seeking beings, the motivation to offend already exists within them and (2) crime is easy to commit and thus no acquisition of special skills is required.

Instead, Hirschi contends that crime occurs when people are *not socialized properly into conventional beliefs*. For Hirschi, criminals do not live in some isolated, self-contained criminal subculture where they learn a different way of seeing the world that requires conformity to crime. Rather, they grow up within the dominant society where, from early in life onward, they have received the message from parents, teachers, and clergy that breaking the law is wrong. Hirschi thus observes that criminals violate laws they believe in. What he means by this is that offenders know that crime is wrong because they have been socialized into the dominant culture. Why, then, do they break the

law? It is because their socialization has been defective. As a result, their belief in the moral validity of laws or rules is weak or "attenuated." And when bonds are weak, criminal conduct becomes possible.

So, let us put this matter simply. For social learning theorists—ranging from Sutherland to Akers—people go into crime because they *learn criminal beliefs* that define such acts as required, good, or permissible. For Hirschi, people go into crime because they *fail to internalize conventional beliefs* to the degree needed to control them from succumbing to the seductions of vice, violence, or thievery.

Finally, recall from Chapter 3 that this same debate marks community theories of crime. On one side, there is the cultural deviance perspective, which argues that oppositional criminal codes are learned and lead to crime. On the other side, there is the cultural attenuation perspective, which argues that weak allegiance to the criminal culture is what makes crime possible. In this context, Hirschi's ideas on belief are the individual-level version of the community-level theory of *attenuated* conventional culture (see Kornhauser, 1978).

Assessing Social Bond Theory

Since its publication in 1969 in *Causes of Delinquency*, Hirschi's social bond theory has been one of the most, if not *the* most, tested theories in the field of criminology (Kempf, 1993). The results of this large body of studies, however, are difficult to interpret. As Kempf (1993) pointed out, the existing research has been characterized by diverse and at times weak measures of the four social bonds and by inconsistent findings. Still, the fairest assessment is that there is evidence that the presence of social bonds is inversely related to delinquency and to adult crime (Gottfredson, 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1993). According to Akers and Sellers's (2004, p. 122) review of the existing research, the magnitude of this relationship between bonds and offending appears to range "from moderate to low" (see also Kubrin et al., 2009).

These findings thus suggest that social bonds are implicated in crime but that they are not the sole cause of offending. This observation prompts us to ask what might be missing from Hirschi's control perspective. One potential limitation to his theory is that it was based on the assumption that humans are naturally self-interested and thus need no special motivation to break the law. Again, as a control theorist Hirschi asserted that the key theoretical problem was to explain what restrains people from acting on their natural inclination to gratify their desires by stealing, hitting, driving fast, becoming inebriated, and other such wrongdoing. However, as noted above, it seems unlikely that all individuals are, in fact, *equally motivated* to commit crimes. And if not, then a complete theory must include factors—such as exposure to strain and the learning of criminal definitions—that make some people more strongly predisposed or "motivated" to offend than other people.

Another limitation to Hirschi's perspective is his failure to explore how social bonds are potentially affected by the larger social forces in American society. Theorists may legitimately choose to restrict their focus to a limited problem. In this case, Hirschi chose to focus on the emergence of bonds within a youth's immediate or proximate social context of the family and school. Still, in staking out this explanatory territory, Hirschi did not explore how the formation of social bonds is affected by factors such as changing gender roles, neighborhood disorganization, enduring racial inequality, or the deterioration of the urban industrial economy (for an example of a more contextualized use of social bond theory, see Sampson & Laub, 1994). Despite having an analytical elegance, his theory thus tends to be detached—to stand at arm's length—from many of the pressing realities of American society. Notably, this contrasts sharply with Shaw and McKay who tried to illuminate how the breakdown of control was shaped by large social forces (e.g., immigration, urbanization) that were placing communities at risk of social disorganization.

Finally, Hirschi argued that social bond theory applied equally to African Americans and to Whites. Based on limited data analyses, he concluded that unjust deprivation from racial discrimination—a factor that strain theorists Cloward and Ohlin (1960) linked to delinquency—was not criminogenic for minorities. As a result, there was no need to develop a theory that was race-specific—that is, that explored whether some experiences might have a unique crime-inducing effect for African Americans

but not for Whites. According to Hirschi (1969, pp. 79–80), "There is no reason to believe that the causes of crime among Negroes are different from those among whites. . . . It follows . . . that we need not study Negro boys to determine the causes of their delinquency."

Notably, however, James Unnever and colleagues (2009) revisited the Richmond Youth Project data set, generously supplied to them by Hirschi, which was the basis for Hirschi's dissertation and, eventually, for *Causes of Delinquency*. This data set, based on a survey of junior and senior high school students, was originally collected in 1964 under the direction of Alan B. Wilson. Then a graduate student, Hirschi rose from an unpaid assistant to the project's deputy director. He was allowed to place questions on the survey and to use the data for his dissertation (Laub, 2002). As is common practice in criminology, Hirschi included in his empirical analysis only those variables that seemed to measure the theories he was assessing (strain, cultural deviance, and control). Unnever et al.'s inspection of the Richmond Youth Project survey instrument, however, revealed a range of other questions that more directly measured perceived racial discrimination by the African American males in the sample. More noteworthy, when they reanalyzed Hirschi's data, they found that perceived racial discrimination was a robust predictor of delinquent involvement whose effects rivaled those of the social bond measures.

This discovery is important for two reasons. First, if Hirschi had expanded his investigation to include these items in the mid-1960s, the future of criminology might have been quite different. Hirschi might have concluded that, although social bonds have similar effects across race, perceived and real racial discrimination is a distinctive risk factor experienced by African American youngsters. Given Hirschi's stature, a whole line of inquiry might have been undertaken, in the context of the civil rights movement, that explored how the racial animus faced by minorities places a special criminogenic burden on them.

Second, Unnever et al.'s findings are not idiosyncratic. There is now a small but growing body of research showing that perceived racial discrimination leads to delinquency and other problems among African Americans (Agnew, 2006b; Unnever, 2014; Unnever et al., 2009; see also Brody et al., 2006; Burt et al., 2012; Gibbons et al., 2004; Simons et al., 2003; Simons et al., 2006). This is an issue that criminologists—whether control theorist or not—need to explore in the time ahead (see, more generally, Gabbidon, 2007). Recall from Chapter 4 that Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) have taken an important step in this direction in their "theory of African American offending," which explores the sources and consequences of Blacks' experiences with and perceptions of racial discrimination (see Unnever, 2014; Unnever et al., 2017; Unnever et al., 2016).

HIRSCHI'S SECOND THEORY: SELF-CONTROL AND CRIME

As we have seen, Hirschi's *social bond theory* has continued to be a major paradigm since it was set forth in 1969 in *Causes of Delinquency*. A little over two decades later, however, Hirschi joined with Michael Gottfredson to set forth a related but different control theory: *self-control theory*. This perspective created considerable controversy and generated considerable research on its central premise that self-control had "general effects"—that is, that it was the key causal factor in crime and deviance across an individual's life and across social groups. For this reason, they claimed to have set forth a "general theory of crime."

Gottfredson's first contact with Hirschi came as an undergraduate at the University of California at Davis, when he took Hirschi's course on juvenile delinquency. Gottfredson would later pursue his doctorate at, and be invited to join the faculty of, the University at Albany (then known as the State University of New York at Albany). Hirschi also moved to Albany's School of Criminal Justice, where Gottfredson and he developed a working relationship. This collaboration would continue at the University of Arizona where they would both serve on the faculty (Gottfredson, 2011).

In the sections that follow, we first review the central ideas of self-control theory. We then assess the theory's empirical status and conceptual challenges. Finally, we consider how, despite sharing some common views, Hirschi's two control theories—social bond and self-control—represent incompatible,

if not competing, explanations of crime. This discussion includes Hirschi's largely problematic effort to reconcile the constructs of self-control and social bonds through his revised social control theory.

Self-Control and Crime

In *A General Theory of Crime*, Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi crafted an explanation of crime that departs significantly from Hirschi's earlier work. As noted previously, social bond theory rejected the attempt to explain crime through internalized control. Instead, taking a distinctively sociological approach, Hirschi (1969) emphasized that control is sustained by individuals' continuing relationship with the conventional order—by their bonds to family, school, work, everyday activities, and beliefs. By contrast, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) abandoned the idea that continuing social bonds insulate against illegal involvement in favor of the proposition that self-control, internalized early in life, determines who will fall prey to the seductions of crime.

The Nature and Impact of Low Self-Control. It is perhaps instructive that Gottfredson and Hirschi's conception of control as a permanent internal state rather than as an ongoing sociological product reflects a broader trend in criminological theory, encouraged by the context of the 1980s, to revitalize individual theories of crime (see Chapter 12). In any case, Gottfredson and Hirschi contended that their approach was formulated for a more important reason: It explains what we know about the nature of crime. As criminologists who believe in science and facts, they were led to develop this new general theory of crime.

Gottfredson and Hirschi claimed that much criminological theorizing pays virtually no attention to the facts about the nature of crime uncovered by empirical research. There are exceptions, such as Albert Cohen (1955) whose focus on the nonutilitarian nature of delinquency illuminated how youths coped with status frustration and James Messerschmidt (1993) who examined how crime can be a means of "doing masculinity." But, overall, Gottfredson and Hirschi were correct that in most causal theoretical models, crime is seen only as some nondescript dependent or outcome variable and its nature is not treated as telling us much about the nature of the offender. This implicit assumption, however, is odd. Let us take two individuals: One enjoys riding roller coasters and driving a motorcycle at high speeds without wearing a helmet; the other enjoys singing in the church choir and reading a good book. Most of us would agree that such behavioral choices would provide a pretty good clue as to which individual prefers risk and which does not.

According to Gottfredson and Hirschi, here are the key facts about crime: Crime provides short-term gratification such as excitement, small amounts of money, and relief from situational aggravations. People who are involved in crime also engage in behaviors that are "analogous" or similar to crime in that they too furnish short-term gratification—such as smoking, substance abuse, speeding in automobiles, gambling, and irresponsible sexual behaviors. Criminals do not plan their conduct. Their crimes are not specialized or sophisticated but rather are responses to whatever easy illegal opportunities present themselves. Similarly, offenders fail in social domains—school, work, marriage, and so on—that require planning, sustained effort, and delayed gratification. What, then, do these facts about the nature of crime tell us about who offenders are? They must be, observed Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), individuals who "tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, shortsighted, and nonverbal" (p. 90).

Gottfredson and Hirschi discussed these six characteristics as "elements of self-control" (p. 89). The most prominent scale of low self-control measures these six elements by including four items to assess each element (Grasmick, Tittle, Bursik, & Arneklev, 1993). However, unlike the four social bonds in Hirschi's earlier social control theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) did not conceive of these elements as constituting six distinct constructs. Rather, they saw them as comprising a *single general propensity for crime*, which they originally labeled as *criminality*. What they were describing was how individuals differed in the ability to resist crime. They called this "the problem of

self-control: the differential tendency of people to avoid criminal acts whatever the circumstances in which they find themselves" (p. 89). That is, "people differ in the extent to which they are vulnerable to the temptations of the moment" (p. 89).

If crime and analogous behaviors provide easy gratification, then why does not everyone engage in these acts? Logic suggests that something must be restraining law-abiding citizens from taking advantage of the ubiquitous temptations they confront in their daily routines. Of course, Hirschi's (1969) first theory identified one source of control: social bonds. But in *A General Theory of Crime*, the phrase "social bond" (or "social control" as Hirschi often referred to his first theory) does not appear in the book's index. On page 87, there is a passing reference to the choice of crime being affected by "social or external control" because the "costs of crime depend on the individual's current location in or bond to society." But the idea is not developed and plays no part in the general theory.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) also distinguished between criminality and crime—between low self-control and the actual commission of a criminal act. They argued that even if someone desires to offend, crime can occur only if the *opportunity* exists to engage in the conduct. So, another answer that might have been given is that some people commit a lot of crime because they have access to criminal opportunities, whereas those without such access cannot act on their impulses and therefore stay crime free. But the importance of opportunity in their explanation of offending mostly vanishes because they see crime as very easy to commit and as taking few, if any, skills. Crime opportunities thus are everywhere and available to everyone. In essence, opportunity is so ubiquitous as to become a *constant*, and a constant cannot explain *variation* in behavior.

At this point, then, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) relinquished social causation of crime—whether social bonds or differential opportunity—and moved the source of control (and thus of crime) inside the individual. As noted, they argued that crime is due to *individual differences* in the *propensity to resist* the easy, immediate gratification offered by crime and analogous behaviors. Control thus no longer resides in the quality of social relationships (strength of bonds) but as a quality of *the self* (strength of self-control).

In the general theory, people are not bound by external ties as social bond theory proposed but rather make choices based on how much willpower they have. Those with a high level of self-control do not hit people when provoked, do not shoplift fancy clothes displayed in department stores, and do not grab computers sticking out of a backpack. They also do not drive fast without a seatbelt on, use offensive language in public, have unprotected sex, get tattoos while inebriated, cut classes, and quit their jobs when bored or angry (see, e.g., Reisig & Pratt, 2011). They resist situational motivations that create immediate temptations that, on reflection later, anyone with good judgment would know are criminal, dangerous, or foolish.

Thus, Gottfredson and Hirschi's key thesis is this: *The lower the level of self-control, the higher the level of crime, analogous (or deviant) behavior, and social failure.* This is a parsimonious theory, so simple in fact that it would not seem destined to be the leading theory of crime a quarter century after it was set forth. But its simplicity is its genius; all scholars can understand this thesis and how to test it (i.e., see if some measure of self-control produces some undesirable outcome). Clarity and testability mean that scholars continue to conduct empirical studies of the general theory. In fact, it is a criminological industry that shows no signs of slowing down.

The Origins of Self-Control. Gottfredson and Hirschi registered one other fact of crime that most of their contemporary criminologists in 1990 had ignored: Involvement in antisocial behavior, including crime, appears to be stable across the life course. Thus, children manifesting conduct problems tend to grow into juvenile delinquents and eventually into adult offenders. Gottfredson and Hirschi's embrace of stability had two important implications.

First, it meant that social bond theory had to be wrong. Hirschi's first theory was intended to explain not only stability but also change in offending (see Sampson & Laub, 1993; see Chapter 16 in this volume on this issue). Similar to Matza (1964), Hirschi had criticized rival perspectives for being

theories of stability because their causal variables (e.g., strain from blocked opportunity and the learning of criminal values) were unlikely to change as offenders grew older (i.e., they still were denied the American dream and they still belonged to a criminal culture). By contrast, social bond theory could explain *change*, including "maturational reform" or the aging out of delinquency by many youths (see also Moffitt, 1993, on adolescence-limited offending). In this view, juveniles' bonds weakened during the teen years to spike involvement in crime but then strengthened and pulled these same individuals out of crime as adulthood brought the ties of marriage and employment.

But once Gottfredson and Hirschi emphasized stability in wayward behavior across the life course, change evaporated as an issue to be explained. Because desistance from crime never occurred, the task instead was to account only for continuity in bad conduct—from childhood to adulthood. Gottfredson and Hirschi argued that criminal propensity—a permanent individual difference—was carried across the life course. This trait, of course, was low self-control. Thus, people were antisocial in childhood because they lacked self-control; they were delinquent as teens because they still lacked self-control; and they were criminal in adulthood because they continued to lack self-control. There no longer was any role for social bonds to play in Hirschi's theorizing.

Second, if stability in antisocial conduct started in childhood, this meant that the *origins of self-control must occur during the early years in life*. Note that this represented a major attack on all criminological theories that linked crime to any social condition or other factor that occurred after age 8 or 10. Academic departments have entire courses devoted to juvenile delinquency that focus on the experiences in the teenage years that are criminogenic. Gottfredson and Hirschi were arguing, in essence, that all these theories were incorrect. In fact, nothing that occurs after age 10, whether during the juvenile years or in adulthood, is related to crime. Only low self-control matters. In their view, many conditions that scholars believed caused crime—such as school failure or gang membership— were in fact *the result of low self-control*. Their relationship to crime was illusory (we use the term *spurious*). Thus, individuals low in self-control not only offend but also fail at school and self-select themselves into gangs. Crime and these conditions are correlated, but only because the same person is making a series of bad choices due to his or her low self-control. When two variables are correlated but explained by a third common cause, we describe this as a *spurious relationship*. As such, Gottfredson and Hirschi portrayed criminology as a field replete with spurious theories.

What, then, determines whether a child will develop self-control? Gottfredson and Hirschi rejected biological sources of this trait, a decision that would later prove incorrect (see, e.g., Beaver, Ferguson, & Lynn-Whatley, 2010; Wright & Beaver, 2005, 2013). Ironically, they set forth a sociological explanation, arguing that the effectiveness of parental management determined a child's level of self-control. In what has been termed the *parental management thesis*, they proposed that *self-control* was a product of *direct control*—that is, how parents supervise their offspring (Cullen, Unnever, Wright, & Beaver, 2008).

Importantly, Gottfredson and Hirschi assume that low self-control is natural—it is the human nature with which we are born. As control theorists, they see humans as seekers of immediate gratification through the easiest means possible. Inculcating in a child the capacity to resist such pleasures is challenging. Effective parental management involves three key ingredients, all of which must be present for self-control to be developed. Thus, parents must do the following: (1) monitor their child; (2) recognize deviant behavior when it occurs; and (3) punish or correct the misconduct.

Parental management can fail for a variety of reasons. For example, if the family size is large or only a single parent is present, less time may be available to monitor the child. Parents who are criminals may lack the self-control to parent consistently or the values to recognize deviant behavior when it occurs. Or it may be that some parents do not know how to punish and correct, instead engaging in harsh and erratic discipline that is counterproductive. Perhaps most important is how much parents care for their child. It is here that the concept of *attachment* is introduced into the general theory. However, in this case, it is not the child's bond to the parents that motivates conformity but the parents' bond to the child that motivates the effort to engage in direct control over the child.

Finally, Gottfredson and Hirschi do not rule out the possibility that schools or other social institutions might play a role in inculcating self-control, though they have little faith that this will occur. In their view, "self-control differences seem primarily attributable to family socialization practices. It is difficult for subsequent institutions to make up for deficiencies, but socialization is a task that, once successfully accomplished, appears to be largely irreversible" (1990, p. 107). Thus, those with the misfortune of having parents who are neglectful and ineffectual in child rearing face a bleak future. Lacking self-control, they not only will be attracted to crime but also are likely to fail in and drop out of school, to lose jobs, and to be unable to sustain meaningful intimate relationships. By contrast, children with parents with enough caring and resources to supervise and punish their misconduct will develop the self-control needed to resist the easy temptations offered by crime and to sustain the hard work necessary to succeed in school, work, and marriage.

Assessing Self-Control Theory

Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) *A General Theory of Crime* now is three decades old. Because it has remained a dominant perspective, it has been subjected to extensive empirical tests and conceptual analysis. Here, we discuss this evaluative literature in four parts: (1) the theory's empirical status, (2) qualifications of the original statement of the theory, (3) oversights by the theory, and (4) elaborations of the theory.

Empirical Status. Empirical tests of Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) perspective generally support the theory's conclusion that low self-control is related to criminal involvement, including across cultures (Brownfield & Sorenson, 1993; Burton, Cullen, Evans, & Dunaway, 1994; Chapple, 2005; Chapple & Hope, 2003; Evans, Cullen, Burton, Dunaway, & Benson, 1997; Grasmick et al., 1993; Keane, Maxim, & Teevan, 1993; Nagin & Paternoster, 1993; Sellers, 1999; Vazsonyi, Pickering, Junger, & Hessing, 2001; Ward, Gibson, Boman, & Leite, 2010; Wood, Pfefferbaum, & Arneklev, 1993; for a more general assessment, see Goode, 2008; Hay & Meldrum, 2016; Serrano Maíllo & Birkbeck, 2014). Indeed, two meta-analyses of the existing empirical literature—one older (Pratt & Cullen, 2000) and one more recent (Vazsonyi et al., 2017)—found that self-control is an important predictor of crime (see also DeLisi & Vaughan, 2014). In a narrative review of more than 15 years of research, Michael Gottfredson (2006) has put the matter more forcefully (see also Britt & Gottfredson, 2003; Hay & Meldrum, 2016; Kubrin et al., 2009):

> In the context of the theory, however, the claims for self-control are quite strong. As a general cause, it should predict rate differences everywhere, for all crime, delinquencies and related behaviors, for all times, among all groups and countries. . . . A very large number of high quality empirical studies published since the theory was developed now, in the aggregate, provide very significant support for these strong claims. (pp. 83–84)

Although ignored by Gottfredson and Hirschi, research from psychology has long established that self-control is related to a host of life outcomes. The most famous example of this research is the so-called "marshmallow test" conducted by Walter Mischel and his colleagues, starting at Stanford University in the late 1960s and then continuing in a variety of settings over the years (see Mischel, 2014). The subjects were preschoolers enrolled in Stanford's Bing Nursery School between 1968 and 1974, who then were followed well into adulthood. The purpose of the experiment was to assess the youngsters' ability to exercise self-control and delay gratification. The children were asked to sit at a small desk in what was called the "Surprise Room," where they had just played. They were instructed to select a treat that they liked to eat; alas, most participants did not pick marshmallows but other goodies such as cookies. At any rate, they were told that they had two choices. They could eat the treat any time they wished, or, if they waited for the researcher to return by herself, they would get

two treats. Timed by how long they waited, the preschoolers showed clear individual differences in self-control. Most remarkable, in their follow-ups, Mischel and his associates found that these early differences were related to later life outcomes—much as Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory predicts (for an assessment, see Watts, Duncan, & Quan, 2018). As Mischel (2014) notes:

> The more seconds they waited at age four or five, the higher their SAT scores and the better their rated social and cognitive functioning in adolescence. At age 27–32, those who had waited longer during the Marshmallow Test in preschool had a lower body mass index and a better sense of self-worth, pursued their goals more effectively, and coped more adaptively with frustration and stress. At midlife, those who could consistently wait ("high delay"), versus who couldn't ("low delay"), were characterized by distinctively different brain scans in areas linked to addictions and obesity. (p. 5)

Theoretical Qualifications. Given the existing level of empirical support, it seems likely that this perspective will continue to influence criminological thinking in the time ahead. It is clear that Gottfredson and Hirschi have identified a factor in self-control that has wide-ranging effects. At the same time, self-control theory appears to be overstated in places.

Thus, although self-control explains variation in criminal involvement, this does not mean that causes identified by rival theoretical models, such as differential association, are unimportant (Baron, 2003; Brownfield & Sorenson, 1993; Burton et al., 1994; Nagin & Paternoster, 1993; Pratt & Cullen, 2000). In fact, in a study of middle-school students, Unnever, Cullen, and Agnew (2006) found that low self-control and aggressive attitudes not only both independently predict delinquency but also have a significant *interactive* effect on violent and nonviolent offending. It appears that both low self-control and attitudes supportive of aggression (a social learning theory variable) are criminogenic risk factors (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Similarly, it seems unlikely that individual differences in self-control and misconduct, established early in life, will always remain stable across the life course; change is possible. In research we revisit in Chapter 16, Robert Sampson and John Laub (1993) presented longitudinal data showing that adult social bonds, such as stable employment and cohesive marriages, can redirect offenders into a pathway to conformity well beyond their childhood years.

Furthermore, the relationship among self-control, crime, and analogous behaviors is potentially problematic. It is doubtful that criminal and analogous (in this case deviant) behaviors will be strongly correlated among all offenders—including, for example, white-collar criminals who have evidenced delayed gratification in acquiring high-status occupational positions (Benson & Moore, 1992). And some (but not all) evidence suggests that, contrary to theoretical predictions, self-control is not strongly related to all types of analogous behaviors, such as smoking (Arneklev, Grasmick, Tittle, & Bursik, 1993), or to all forms of crime, such as intimate violence (Sellers, 1999; cf. Gottfredson, 2006).

Another thesis that has merit but is likely overstated is Gottfredson and Hirschi's contention that ineffective parenting—the failure of parents to care enough to monitor, recognize, and punish wayward conduct—is the chief source of low self-control. A number of studies have been conducted that support the impact of parenting on levels of self-control in the predicted direction (for a review, see Cullen et al., 2008). But research also shows that the origins of self-control are likely more complicated than Gottfredson and Hirschi theorized. One study revealed, for example, that the exertion of parental controls might decrease self-control among girls but increase it among boys in nonpatriarchal homes (Blackwell & Piquero, 2005). There also is evidence that, beyond parental management, levels of self-control are increased by effective school socialization and decreased by adverse neighborhood conditions (Pratt, Turner, & Piquero, 2004; Turner, Piquero, & Pratt, 2005). Even more important, research suggests that parents may affect levels of self-control less by their parenting styles and more by genetic transmission (Beaver et al., 2010; Wright & Beaver, 2005; see also Unnever, Cullen, & Pratt, 2003). These findings are consistent with studies in psychology reporting that personality traits—including

those similar to the construct of low self-control (e.g., impulsivity)—are modestly influenced by parenting but have approximately half their variance attributable to heredity (Harris, 1995, 1998).

Finally, it is notable that self-control can be established in childhood among troubled children who, it would appear, did not have this propensity instilled by their parents or other caregivers. Thus, meta-analyses of early self-control improvement programs (for youngsters up to age 10) reveal that these interventions are effective in increasing self-control and reducing conduct problems and delinquency (Piquero, Jennings, & Farrington, 2010; Piquero, Jennings, Farrington, Diamond, & Gonzales, 2016). Whether self-control is malleable at later ages and susceptible to intervention remains to be established.

Theoretical Oversights. Beyond contentions that might be overstated, it also is relevant to consider what might be missing from self-control theory. In this regard, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) failed to resolve a hidden inconsistency in their thinking. On the one hand, they implied that social class is an unimportant correlate of crime and that crime is found across the class structure. On the other hand, the logic of their model seemingly predicts a strong correlation between class and crime. Their image of offenders is that of people who are social failures. Lacking self-control, offenders do poorly in school and in the job market. They inevitably slide into the lower class. Furthermore, offenders can be expected to be inadequate parents themselves, passing on low self-control and economic disadvantage to their offspring. Over generations, then, crime should be concentrated increasingly in the bottom rungs of society. In the future, this inconsistency will require systematic attention.

Relatedly, although Gottfredson and Hirschi may have identified a crucial link in the chain of conditions causing crime, they remained silent on the larger structural conditions that might affect family well-being, the ability to deliver quality parenting, and the inculcation of self-control. Currie (1985) called this omission the "fallacy of autonomy—the belief that what goes on inside the family can usefully be separated from the forces that affect it from outside: the larger social context in which families are embedded for better or for worse" (p. 185). A more complete understanding of crime, therefore, would place parents and children within the context of a changing American society. In particular, it seems essential to examine the structural forces and government policies that have shredded the social fabric of many inner-city neighborhoods, impeded the development of stable and nurturing families, and placed many youths at risk for early involvement in crime (Currie, 1985, 1989, 1993; Panel on High-Risk Youth, 1993).

Theoretical Elaborations. Some scholars have argued that self-control is more complicated than portrayed by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) and thus needs to be elaborated. Three advances merit consideration.

First, Tittle, Ward, and Grasmick (2004, p. 166) have illuminated the "conceptual incompleteness" of self-control theory. They proposed that the construct of self-control is not a single trait or predisposition but rather involves two elements: the *capacity for self-control* and the *desire for self-control*. Gottfredson and Hirschi have largely theorized about how people differ in their capacity or ability to exercise self-control. Tittle et al. suggested, however, that individuals may also vary in their interest in exercising self-restraint. Although a beginning study, Tittle et al. (2004) present evidence drawn from a community survey of Oklahoma City adults showing that self-control capacity and desire can have independent and interactive effects on forms of misbehavior (see also Cochran, Aleska, & Chamlin, 2006).

In developing the concept of desire for self-control, Tittle et al. (2004) made an effort to bring motivation—what Hirschi had always taken for granted—back into control theory. They noted that one type of motivation is the desire to commit a crime; this is the kind of motivation that traditional theories, such as strain and social learning approaches, try to explain. In contrast, Tittle et al. contended that the desire for self-control was a qualitatively distinct kind of motivation; it was the motivation to resist the lure of offending. These two types of motivation—the desire to

offend and the desire to exercise restraint—are not two ends of the same continuum. Rather, Tittle et al. asserted that they are likely competing motivational forces whose comparative strength may determine whether a criminal act occurs. This fresh view of the complexity of motivation is a line of inquiry that future research might profitably investigate.

Second, Muraven, Pogarsky, and Shmueli (2006) argue that the strength or level of self-control is not static but rather is similar to a muscle that, if overused, becomes weaker (see also Vohs, Baumeister, & Schmeichel, 2012). This *depletion* thesis suggests that self-control is a limited resource. Criminal conduct thus might be expected to increase in situations where people must repeatedly exercise self-control (e.g., when under strain). In an experimental study, Muraven and colleagues showed that when demands on self-control increased, their subjects were more likely to cheat thereafter.

Third, more generally, there is voluminous theory and research in the social psychological field of self-regulation, a term used synonymously with self-control (Vohs & Schmeichel, 2007; see also Dean, 2013). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) derived their theory primarily from criminological traditions and not from this alternative literature. However, future advances in their general theory will be limited if self-regulation theory and research are not fully consulted. For example, Vohs and Schmeichel (2007) document that self-control consists of two components—"urge strength" and "restraint strength." Self-regulation thus may involve either keeping urges in check or resisting urges once they arise. In criminological terms, control may involve suppressing the motivation or urge to offend or resisting the enticement of crime once this urge arises.

This literature also rejects Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) view that levels of self-control are fixed immutably in childhood (Mischel, 2014). Much of the self-regulation field is orientated toward behavioral change, especially in how "bad habits" can be broken and good habits established (e.g., exercising more, dieting) (Dean, 2013). Self-control is thus seen not only as a trait but also as a process. This process involves three stages: (1) setting goals, (2) monitoring progress toward these goals, and (3) developing the regulatory strength to reach the goals (Vohs & Schmeichel, 2007). Self-control failures arise when people set unrealistic goals, do not monitor their actions related to goal attainment, and lack the motivational energy to avoid regulatory depletion. This model would seem to have applicability to explaining why offenders, who often express a desire to desist from crime, nonetheless recidivate. If crime is envisioned as a *bad habit*, then breaking this habit might require not only setting the goal of conformity but also teaching offenders how to monitor progress toward this goal and how to avoid being in circumstances (e.g., no job, no place to live) where self-control depletion is likely to occur.

Self-Control and Social Bonds

As noted, Hirschi set forth two of the most important control models of crime: his early work on social bond theory and his later work, with Gottfredson, on self-control theory. With only limited exceptions (Gottfredson, 2006; Laub, 2002), Hirschi and Gottfredson refrained from detailing precisely how the two perspectives converged and diverged. Thus, in *A General Theory of Crime* there is no attempt to explain the limitations of social bond theory and why they believed that self-control theory would advance our understanding of criminality. Thus, as Laub (2002, p. ix) points out, the "field has been struggling to reconcile" the two perspectives (see, e.g., Longshore, Chang, & Messina, 2005; Taylor, 2001). Below, we add our insights to this controversy (see also Table 6.2).

Hirschi based both perspectives on the notion that the motivation to deviate was rooted in the natural human inclination to pursue immediate gratification in the easiest way possible and without regard for others. Thus, for both theories, the key factor separating wayward and conforming people was whether the *controls* existed to *restrain* them from acting on these impulses. How, then, did Hirschi's control theories differ from one another? As suggested previously, the distinguishing feature was the *source* of the control—social bonds in one case, self-control in the other.

This difference is consequential. Indeed, it is so fundamental that it makes Hirschi's models *rival theoretical perspectives*—a conclusion alluded to previously (compare Hirschi & Gottfredson,

Table 6.2   Hirschi's Two Theories of Crime

Dimension of the Theory	Gottfredson and Hirschi's Self-Control Theory	Hirschi's Social Bond Theory
Nature of control	Self-control	Social bonds
Type of control	Internal	Social: due to quality of relationships to society.
Stability of control	Established in childhood; individual differences in self-control persist throughout life.	Control may change across life as the strength of the social bonds changes.
Relationship of bonds to crime	Spurious; quality of bonds and level of crime both caused by level of self-control.	Causes crime; quality of bonds determines level of crime.

1995, to Sampson & Laub, 1995). Self-control theory is a sociological explanation only in the sense that the effectiveness of early parenting is held to determine the level of self-control that children develop. After this point, however, Hirschi and Gottfredson's perspective becomes a *theory of stable individual differences*. Across the life course, the level of self-control will influence virtually every aspect of a person's life, from involvement in crime to success in all institutional domains (e.g., family, school, employment, marriage). By contrast, Hirschi's original social bond theory is more of a pure sociological theory. The development of social bonds is not limited to childhood; rather, bonds are potentially formed at any age. The theory implies that when bonds are formed, they will restrain deviant motivations and prevent criminal involvement (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Hirschi's two control theories diverge, then, on a critical point. His second perspective argues that *social bonds have no influence on criminal involvement*. Instead, the relationship between social bonds and crime is *spurious* (Evans et al., 1997). For example, take the social bond of attachment to parents. Social bond theory would contend that the bond of attachment reduces delinquency. By contrast, self-control theory would argue that children high in self-control are more likely to be attached to parents and to avoid delinquency, whereas children low in self-control have difficulty in forming attachments and are free to break the law. Therefore, attachment and delinquency are related only because both are caused by a third underlying factor—self-control. (Recall as well from the previous discussion that this claim of spuriousness would pertain not only to social bonds but to any sociological condition said to cause crime.)

Phrased differently, Hirschi changed his mind over the years. He once thought that social bonds were the main determinant of crime. Later, however, he (and Gottfredson) came to believe that social bonds were merely a manifestation of a person's level of self-control and thus had no independent causal relationship to criminal involvement. This issue will surface in Chapter 16, where we revisit Gottfredson and Hirschi and explore the implications of their theory for life-course perspectives, especially the work of Sampson and Laub (1993).

Hirschi's Revised Social Control Theory

In 2004, Hirschi reflected on his social bond and self-control perspectives. He was confronted with two theoretical difficulties. The first we have just mentioned: his failure to reconcile his two control theories that seemed fundamentally at odds with one another. The second involved the tendency of scholars to interpret self-control theory as a "trait" explanation of criminal conduct. It is unclear whether these relatively brief thoughts published in a forum not widely read by criminologists will define a third avenue of social control theory (see also Gottfredson, 2006). Even so, his essay—which may comprise his final thoughts on this subject—is worthy of consideration.

The concept of the social bond presented two interrelated problems for Hirschi who, writing with Gottfredson in *A General Theory of Crime* (1990), developed the construct of self-control. First, because social bonds are unstable over time, changes in their strength cause changes in criminal involvement across the life course. Second, as Sampson and Laub (1993) would point out, the strength of the social bond at any given time is affected by the quality of the relationships in which offenders are involved. The bond is a two-way street; it involves the offender (or potential offender) and those with whom the individual interacts. Again, because relationships both form and end, social bonds are a source not only of continuity but also of change in behavior. These assumptions that bonds are unstable and relationship-based are inconsistent with the premises of self-control theory, which sees control as stable and internal.

Hirschi (2004) now rejects the instability thesis and asserts that social bonds are stable. He does this by asserting that the "source and strength of 'bonds' is almost exclusively within the person reporting or displaying them" (p. 544). Thus, attachment is not based on the quality of the relationship between a parent and a youngster but rather resides mainly in the youth's mind. It is not clear what might occur when parent-child attachments are compromised (e.g., divorce, child abuse), but this possibility recedes to a minor consideration in Hirschi's revised social control theory. In any event, if the social bond is now stable and internal, how does it differ from self-control? It does not, says Hirschi (2004); "they are the same thing" (p. 543). In this way, social bond theory is now "saved" and becomes identical to self-control theory.

But in his revised perspective, self-control also changes its character. In its original statement, those lacking self-control were portrayed as impulsive, risk taking, insensitive to the needs of others, and unable to defer gratification. These "elements of self-control" (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. 89) were hypothesized to constitute a single propensity. For most scholars, this meant, in effect, that self-control was akin to a stable personality trait that individuals carried with them across situations and across the life course.

Hirschi (2004), however, was uncomfortable with his self-control theory being transformed into a psychological trait explanation of crime. In his view, the problem with linking a bad trait to bad behavior is that it omits the way in which individuals make choices. People are not simply bundles of impulses that make delayed gratification difficult. Rather, there is a rational or cognitive process that intervenes between propensity and behavior. People think and then act. Of course, there are individual differences in how people think. Some pay attention to consequences whereas others do not (see also Gottfredson, 2011).

As Hirschi (2004) observed, his theory seemed to suggest—or was interpreted to suggest—that "offenders act as they do because they are what they are (impulsive, hot-headed, selfish, physical risk takers), whereas nonoffenders are, well, none of these" (p. 542). Put another way, self-control was a trait that either prevented or permitted the gratification-seeking side of human nature to seek fulfillment. But for Hirschi, control theory was not meant to strip people of human agency. This was Hirschi's long-standing criticism of positivism in which bad traits were said to equal bad behavior, with the actor somehow disappearing from the equation. Hirschi had meant to retain the classical school idea of people as rational actors—as seeing the world, assessing options, and then acting in their self-interest (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). This feature of his self-control theory, however, was lost in its translation and testing by criminologists. In his 2004 essay, Hirschi intended to reinsert the actor and agency back into the crime equation. Thus, he asserted that "self-control involves cognitive evaluation of competing interests—an idea central to control theories. The theory requires an explanatory mechanism that retains elements of cognizance and rational choice" (p. 542; see also Marcus, 2004).

Thus, in his revised social control theory, Hirschi (2004) redefines self-control as "*the tendency to consider the full range of potential costs of a particular act*" (p. 543, emphasis in original). In short, some people refrain from crime and analogous deviant behaviors because they are able to see the diverse consequences such conduct will have. They do so, Hirschi observes, in large part because they have something to lose—attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs they cherish.

Social bonds are the costs they weigh that inhibit offending. Other individuals, those with low self-control, think little about consequences and hence are free to pursue immediate gratification. Weak in social bonds, there is little about their lives that inhibits going into crime.

Hirschi's revised theory is provocative and offers fresh research possibilities. Indeed, an increasing number of studies have been undertaken that offer some empirical support for his perspective (see, e.g., Bouffard, Craig, & Piquero; 2014; Jones, Lynam, & Piquero, 2015; Piquero & Bouffard, 2007; Ward, Boman, & Jones, 2015). Even so, his theory suffers from two major shortcomings. First, Hirschi provides no clear explanation of the origins of social bonds. By implication, he seems to be saying that social bonds are not established through social relationships but rather reflect a youngster's internal orientation. Very early on, some children are cooperative and eager to please whereas others are lazy and inattentive (Hirschi, 2004, p. 544). If we have bonds, it is because we are the architects, through the choices we make, of these ties to the conventional order. Apparently, individuals differ in their natural capacity to establish social bonds, which in turn are the costs that make self-control more likely. The causal scheme seems to be that self-control creates social bonds, which in turn creates self-control. Second, Hirschi simply asserts that social bonds are stable and thus the "same" as self-control. But these two constructs—social bonds and self-control—cannot be made the same by theoretical fiat (see Ward et al., 2015).

Indeed, in the end, the stability or instability of social bonds, where they come from, and the effects that they have independent of self-control are *empirical questions*. In this regard, the work of Sampson and Laub (1993), whose age-graded social bond theory we discuss more fully in Chapter 16, casts doubt on the central claims of Hirschi's revised social control theory.

Self-Control and Vulnerability to Victimization

In 1999, Christopher Schreck extended Gottfredson and Hirschi's work in an important way, arguing that low self-control might increase the risk not only of criminal and analogous behaviors but also of victimization. He called this idea "self-control as a theory of vulnerability" to victimization (1999, p. 635). Why might low self-control make people more vulnerable to being a crime victim? Schreck presented a complex analysis that can perhaps be captured in four factors that link self-control to victimization (see also Wilcox & Cullen, 2018).

First, low self-control leads individuals to engage in risky lifestyles associated with victimization, such as drinking heavily, staying out alone at night, frequenting dangerous places (e.g., bars with a bad reputation), and associating with offenders—perhaps because they, too, are involved in crime (see Pratt & Turanovic, 2016). Second, alternatively, self-control is needed to engage in effective crime avoidance. Preventing victimization takes effort and attention to details, such as locking car doors and not leaving property unattended. It also means altering lifestyle choices once victimized to avoid being a repeat victim (see Turanovic & Pratt, 2014). Third, those with low self-control tend to be insensitive to the needs of others and thus less likely to develop the kind of close, reciprocal relationships that would inspire friends to protect them from crime. For instance, they may lack a close friend who would see that they were in a vulnerable situation (e.g., highly inebriated) and block a potential perpetrator from sexually assaulting them. Or, as Schreck (1999, p. 636) observes, they may be "less likely to know their next-door neighbors," a situation that would "decrease guardianship around a house and make a break-in more attractive to a burglar." Fourth, those with low self-control may play a role in precipitating their victimization because they lack the cognitive and interpersonal skills to resolve conflicts. Due to their impulsiveness, they may also be unpopular, leading, for example, to their being bullied in school settings (Kulig, Pratt, Cullen, Chouhy, & Unnever, 2017).

In Chapter 13, we review another prominent theory of victimization—routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979). For now, it is sufficient to note that Schreck (1999) succeeded in creating an important alternative theory of victimization that has inspired considerable research over the past two decades (Wilcox & Cullen, 2018). Notably, a meta-analysis of 66 studies by Pratt,

Turanovic, Fox, and Wright (2014) revealed modest, but consistent, support for self-control as a predictor of victimization (mean effect size of .154). Their analysis also suggested that self-control is likely to be moderated by—or exert its effects through—risky lifestyles (e.g., having delinquent peers, using illicit substances, being an offender).

THE COMPLEXITY OF CONTROL

Although Travis Hirschi has been the dominant figure in contemporary control theory, other scholars have also explored the way in which social controls are related to criminal behavior. At its core, control theories traditionally have linked conformity to the presence of control and crime to the absence of control. More recent perspectives, however, have illuminated that social control is a complex phenomenon that may have *differential effects* depending on its quality, its magnitude, and the context in which it is applied. In the sections below, we review three prominent theories that explore the conditions under which control not only restrains offending but also might well prove criminogenic. These include John Hagan's power-control theory, Charles Tittle's control balance theory, and Mark Colvin's coercion theory.

Hagan's Power-Control Theory

Gender and Delinquency. John Hagan's power-control theory shares common aspects with Gottfredson and Hirschi's perspective. First, Hagan (1989) contended that delinquency is more likely when a person has a preference for taking risks, an orientation that Gottfredson and Hirschi saw as central to a lack of self-control. Second, both approaches believe that personal orientations, whether risk taking or self-control, are established by the nature of parenting. In short, families are incubators for or prophylactics against criminal involvement.

At this juncture, the two theories diverge. For Gottfredson and Hirschi, parenting is either good or bad, and this determines whether self-control is or is not inculcated. For Hagan, the critical issue is how the balance of power between parents affects the nature of parenting and, in turn, risk preferences and crime. That is, power relations between husbands and wives shape how children are controlled (hence *power-control* theory).

Hagan contended that in patriarchal families, parents exercise greater control over female children than over male children. The family, in effect, tries to reproduce gender relations in the next generation. Daughters are socialized to be feminine and to value domesticity—in short, to prepare for their futures as homemakers. Sons are encouraged to develop boldness and to experience the world—in short, to prepare for their futures as breadwinners. The result is that boys have stronger preferences for risk taking that, in turn, increase their involvement in delinquency.

In egalitarian families, however, parents supervise female and male children more similarly. "In other words," observed Hagan (1989), "as mothers gain power relative to husbands, daughters gain freedom relative to sons" (p. 157). Again, parents tend to reproduce themselves. Daughters—not just sons—are seen as potentially entering the occupational arena and as being equal partners in future relationships. Unlike girls in patriarchal families, they are not socialized as fully into the "cult of domesticity" and are given more latitude to engage in risky activities. The result is that daughters' and sons' risk preferences become more alike, and, therefore, their rate of involvement in delinquency converges.

Assessing Power-Control Theory. Although power-control theory has not been without its critics and may be in need of some qualification, the perspective is amassing a fair amount of empirical support as a useful theory of delinquency (Blackwell, 2000; Blackwell & Piquero, 2005; Grasmick, Hagan, Blackwell, & Arneklev, 1996; Hagan, 1989; Hagan, Gillis, & Simpson, 1990; Hagan & Kay, 1990; Hill & Atkinson, 1988; Jensen & Thompson, 1990; McCarthy, Hagan, & Woodward, 1999; Singer & Levine, 1988). Furthermore, the theory advances criminological

thinking by illuminating the need to consider how gender-based power relations in society influence parental control and, ultimately, delinquent involvement.

Several considerations, however, have yet to be addressed systematically by power-control theory. First, perhaps the theory's principal limitation is that it remains largely silent on how other structural conditions affect the nature and effectiveness of parenting. In particular, the theory must address the intersection of class and gender and must comment more clearly on how other types of power relationships in society affect crime. For example, the theory is unclear about how delinquency is affected by the parenting practices of single mothers within the context of impoverished communities. Second, the perspective originally was developed more as an explanation of "common" delinquent behavior than as an explanation of chronic and/or serious offending (Hagan, 1989, p. 160). But if a theory cannot account for the kinds of crime that most concern criminologists and policy makers, then its significance is decreased commensurately. Third, although empirical support for the theory exists, most studies have not tested the theory versus competing theories such as social learning theory and theories of individual differences (e.g., low self-control theory). Unless power-control theory enters into such a theoretical "competition," it will be unclear whether the effects of its variables are real or spurious (i.e., their effects will disappear once the effects of other theories' variables are taken into account in statistical tests).

Tittle's Control Balance Theory

Theoretical Propositions. Control theories generally focus on the factors that restrain or "control" the behavior of individuals. They do not consider the control exercised by *these individuals* over their social environment. Charles Tittle, however, made the innovative insight that people are not only *objects* of control but also *agents* of control (Tittle, 1995, 2000). In his *control balance* theory of crime and deviance, he argued that each person has a certain amount of control that he or she is under and a certain amount of control that he or she exerts.

For some individuals, the relative amount of control is in balance; others suffer from a control *deficit*, and still others experience a control *surplus*. Control balance tends to be associated with conformity, and control imbalance tends to be associated with deviance. "The central premise of the theory," observed Tittle (1995), is that "the amount of control to which an individual is subject, relative to the amount of control he or she can exercise, determines the probability of deviance occurring as well as the type of deviance likely to occur" (p. 135). He called this the *control ratio*.

If Tittle merely offered the thesis that control imbalance is criminogenic, then his theory would be parsimonious and easily understood. But for Tittle, the causal process of wayward conduct is complex and contingent on the intersection of an array of factors. Tittle's embrace of complexity is a double-edged sword: He sought to capture—not ignore—the multifaceted conditions that prompt misconduct, but his theory involves so many variables that interact in so many ways that it is difficult to test. Not surprisingly, compared to competing perspectives such as Agnew's general strain theory and Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory, empirical research on control balance theory is limited. Studies published thus far, however, do furnish some supportive evidence for the theory (see, e.g., Baron & Forde, 2007; Hughes, Antonaccio, & Botchkovar, 2015; Piquero & Hickman, 1999; Tittle, 2004, p. 396; for a summary of the evidence, see Fox, Nobles, & Lane, 2016).

Tittle's theory begins by exploring why individuals become *predisposed* to develop a motivation to deviate. The potential for such a predisposition lies in human nature because we are creatures that have a strong urge for autonomy—that is, a proclivity to escape the control that others wish to impose on us. This desire for autonomy is made even more salient when people are blocked from attaining goals they are seeking and when their control ratios are unbalanced. The convergence of these factors—autonomy, goal blockage, and control imbalance—fosters a "state of readiness to experience motivation for deviant behavior" (Tittle, 2000, pp. 319–320).

This predisposition can develop into a clear deviant *motivation* when two conditions transpire. First, the person must "become acutely aware of his [or her] control imbalance and realize that

deviant behavior can change that imbalance either by overcoming a deficit or by extending a surplus" (Tittle, 2000, p. 320). That is, the functionality or payoff of deviance must become apparent. Second, the person must be provoked to experience a "negative emotion"—"a feeling of being debased, humiliated, or denigrated that intensifies the thought that deviance is a possible response to the provocations" (p. 320). Again, deviance is functional in this situation because it allows the person to rectify the attempt to degrade him or her.

Once deviant motivation has emerged, deviant behavior still might not occur. For one thing, a person must have the *opportunity* to engage in a given act. *Constraints* also must be overcome. These might involve situational risks (e.g., getting caught) or an individual's moral inhibitions, level of self-control, or social bonds. Also salient is the control balance ratio, which can shape whether deviant behavior will occur and, if so, what kind will occur.

Tittle sought to have a "general" theory and thus to explain all forms of deviation. He proposed a typology of deviance in which seven behavioral categories are arranged on a continuum. At the midpoint of this continuum lies conformity, which is said to correspond to a situation where there is control balance. On the left side of the continuum, which he labeled *repression*, are three categories, each of which involves a control deficit. Extreme repression yields *submission*, moderate repression yields *defiance*, and marginal repression yields *predation*. On the right side of the continuum, which he called *autonomy*, are three categories that involve a control surplus. Maximum autonomy yields *decadence*, medium autonomy yields *plunder*, and minimum autonomy yields *exploitation*.

Criminologists would mostly be interested in the category of *predation*. Tittle contended that serious forms of crime would occur among people with small deficits in control. When deficits are limited, the individual may well judge that a criminal act might be successful in erasing the control imbalance that he or she is experiencing. A youngster's use of violence, for example, could change his or her control ratio and cause other juveniles to leave the youngster alone. If faced with a larger control deficit, however, a person might merely submit or perhaps engage in less serious forms of deviance, such as vandalism, that show defiance but do not elicit costly actions from those capable of exerting control over the person. Control surpluses generally free people to engage in a range of deviant acts without consequences. Tittle noted that many forms of corporate and white-collar crimes are due to such control surpluses (see Piquero & Piquero, 2006).

In 2004, Tittle refined his theory, replacing his typology of deviance with a continuum along which deviant acts, including crime, can be placed. Thus, he argues that any deviant act can be rated as to its degree of *control balance desirability*. This construct involves two factors. First, deviant acts vary in their "likely long-range effectiveness" in altering a person's "control imbalance." Second, deviant acts vary in the degree to which committing them requires that a person "is directly involved with a victim or an object that is affected by the deviance" (Tittle, 2004, p. 405). Long-range effectiveness is desirable because it means that the problem of a control imbalance is resolved, thus making further action unnecessary. Avoiding direct involvement with a victim is desirable because distance and impersonality lessen the chance that the person will be subjected to countervailing reactions. For example, if a worker were to assault a boss who humiliated the individual, the assault would have low control balance desirability. Why? Because the worker would only temporarily alter his or her control imbalance vis-à-vis the boss. There also would likely be a reaction by the boss that might ultimately make the control deficit worse (e.g., hit the worker back; fire the worker; have the worker arrested). In any case, the challenge that awaits is to explore how the core elements of Tittle's theory predict when acts of varying levels of control balance desirability will be committed (see Tittle, 2004).

Assessing Control Balance Theory. Again, Tittle presented a fascinating theory that revises the core proposition of previous control theories. Traditional control theories link crime to a *breakdown or lack of control*. Although Tittle would agree with this thesis (to a degree), he made the poignant suggestion that *too much control*, which places a person in a control deficit, also may be a cause of

crime (see also Sherman, 1993). His insight that crime can function to restore a sense of control is consistent with other theories that emphasize the role of criminal behavior in resolving problems, such as relieving strain, proving masculinity, and defending self-respect through defiance.

Tittle's theory, however, has some potential weaknesses. First, Tittle can be admired for attempting to develop a theory that not only demarcates the causes of crime and deviance but also links these causal elements to the nature of the phenomena being explained (i.e., first his typology deviance, which then was replaced by his continuum of control balance desirability). But this is likely to be an unprofitable line of inquiry. It seems nearly impossible, for example, to measure what the control balance desirability would be for the endless acts that are seen as being deviant, let alone criminal—especially since the desirability of an act could vary by a host of situational factors (thus, threatening a bothersome boss with assault might be more or less desirable depending on how big the perpetrator was and how scared the boss was). Even if strides could be made in measuring the control balance desirability of acts, scholars are unlikely to find this complex and tedious task an attractive use of their time. In the end, Tittle's theory will find more adherents if he abandons attempts to define and measure deviance and instead concentrates his attention on the conditions under which control balance leads to crime as opposed to other outcomes. Notably, this is the strategy of virtually every other theory.

Second, his emphasis on autonomy as the wellspring of human motivation seems unnecessarily limited. Why not consider, for example, the desire for self-gratification, a drive that many other control theories claim is universal and central to the motivation to deviate?

Third, Tittle relegated the main causal variables from other theories, such as self-control, social bonds, and social learning, to the secondary role of *constraints* or *contingencies*. A competing theorist such as Ronald Akers, for example, would argue instead that social learning has important "main effects" or independent influences on criminal behavior apart from any of the processes outlined by Tittle. As with other theories seeking greater credibility, the challenge is to pit control balance theory in an empirical contest versus other theories. Only in this way will it be possible to assess whether, relative to other known predictors of crime, the control ratio factors identified by Tittle exert strong or weak effects on criminal behavior.

Colvin's Differential Coercion Theory

Mark Colvin's differential coercion theory is another perspective that argues that the impact of control on crime will differ by its quality. As detailed in the following section, he is troubled by the use of coercion as a means of control, whether in social institutions or in the criminal justice system. In fact, Colvin has long been critical of the extreme form of capitalism in the United States (what Currie, 2013, called the "market economy"), which he believes is conducive to coercion (Colvin & Pauly, 1983; Vander Ven & Colvin, 2013). In his view, capitalism is a competition in which the owners and managers of businesses seek to maximize profits at the expense of workers. Unions are especially important, because they provide one of the only means that laborers can use to limit their employers' workplace control over them and to increase their compensation (e.g., pay, medical benefits, vacation time). The capitalist class has attacked unions and decreased their membership, which has resulted in workers experiencing more coercion both from managers they have no power to resist and from living in financially insecure, harsh conditions.

According to Colvin, coercion in the means of production is reproduced in other settings (see Colvin & Pauly, 1983). For example, research shows that workers who are controlled coercively in the workplace are more likely to use coercive child rearing in their families (Vander Ven & Colvin, 2013). Further, the nation's culture is penetrated by the concern for profits at all costs (see also Messner & Rosenfeld, 2013). Thus, "bleeding heart liberals" are mocked, and a culture of "looking out for number one" is trumpeted (Vander Ven & Colvin, 2013, p. 616). Mean-spirited messages about the poor (e.g., "lazy and undeserving welfare queens") and about offenders (e.g., "lock them up and throw away the key") legitimate coercive policies and undermine social welfare reforms.

With the current balance of power tilting toward the capitalist class and away from labor, coercion is likely to become further entrenched and remain a constant source of crime in the United States.

By placing his theory in a structural context, Colvin is similar to Hagan whose power-control perspective is rooted in an understanding of patriarchy. Other control theorists—especially Hirschi in his two theories—ignore the structural arrangements of American society. They present mainly micro-level theories that identify sources of crime that seem to exist in a sociohistorical vacuum. Low self-control might be related to crime across social contexts, but Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) do not explore how this key criminogenic factor is affected by, say, life in a crime-ridden inner-city neighborhood or life during America's Great Recession that started in 2008. At the same time, the brilliance of Hirschi's theories must be recognized: They clearly identify the proximate causes of crime. Perspectives that focus on macro-structural conditions but are fuzzy on how crime actually occurs lose their persuasiveness. In this regard, Colvin (2000) has done the heavy theoretical lifting of specifying the precise mechanisms through which coercion leads to crime. This causal model is thus considered next.

Theoretical Propositions. From birth onward, people are exposed to varying levels of coercion—an experience that is consequential. Thus, some people have the good fortune of living in social environments where compliance is secured largely through noncoercive means. Other individuals, however, encounter coercive environments across the life course. Often, this coercion is harsh and erratic, a combination that creates strong criminal predispositions and fosters chronic offending. According to Colvin:

> Chronic criminals are made, not born. They emerge from a developmental process that is punctuated by recurring erratic episodes of coercion. They become both the recipients and the perpetrators of coercion, entrapped in a dynamic that propels them along a pathway toward chronic criminality. (Colvin, 2000, p. 1)

Colvin (2000) defined *interpersonal coercion* as the "threat of force and intimidation aimed at creating compliance through fear" (p. 5). Such coercion may involve physical punishments or the withdrawal of love and support. People also may face *impersonal coercion*, which is "pressure arising from structural arrangements and circumstances that seem beyond individual control such as economic and social pressure caused by unemployment, poverty, or competition among businesses or other groups" (p. 5). Frequently, these two forms of coercion intersect, with those subject to interpersonal coercion living in environments most affected by impersonal forms of coercion.

Colvin called his perspective *differential coercion theory* because, in his view, people vary in the extent to which they are exposed to coercion. This is much like Sutherland used the term *differential association* to refer to variation in exposure to sources of criminal learning. Colvin's use of this term also is similar to Regoli and Hewitt's (1997) *differential oppression theory*. In any case, Colvin argued that controls aimed at securing compliance—aimed at getting people to obey social norms—vary along two dimensions. First, the controls can be either *coercive* or *noncoercive*. Second, the controls can be applied in a way that is either *consistent* or *erratic*. Consistent noncoercive controls are most likely to create psychologically healthy youths who are unlikely to break the law. The most problematic combination, however, is when control is exercised in a coercive and erratic fashion. This form of differential coercion, according to Colvin, produces chronic criminality.

In Colvin's model, coercive and erratic control produces many of the factors that other theorists believe cause crime. In this sense, it is an "integrated" theory. Still, the primary causal factor in this theory—differential coercion—is unique. In any event, harsh and inconsistent coercion creates a sense of unfairness and "anger" (general strain theory), "weak or alienated social bonds" (social bond theory), "coercive modeling" (social learning theory), "perceived control deficits with feelings of debasement" (control balance theory), and "low self-control" (Gottfredson & Hirschi's general theory) (Colvin, 2000, p. 43). In combination, these factors create a strong overall predisposition for

chronic involvement in crime. These forces, which Colvin called social psychological deficits, also foster within individuals a *coercive ideation*. Here people have a worldview that coercion can best be overcome by acting coercively in return. Harboring such thinking, they risk becoming involved in predatory behaviors, using violence or the threat of violence to control their environments.

Colvin (2000, p. 87) indicated that the causes of chronic criminality are both intergenerational and developmental. The process begins with parents who come from coercive backgrounds, are employed in coercive workplaces, and are buffeted by impersonal coercive forces (e.g., economic recessions, poverty, racism, harsh living conditions). Such parents then reproduce themselves, so to speak, by using coercive and erratic child-rearing techniques. Their social psychological deficits and coercive ideation are thus transmitted to their children. In turn, these youngsters enter social environments—school, peer groups, and so on—where they experience harsh controls, further reinforcing their deficits and coercive thinking orientations. As they move into early adulthood, they tend to be employed in the secondary labor market, which fails to lift them out of poverty and exposes them to coercive working conditions. Often, they are ensnared in the criminal justice system, where they experience more coercive treatment. These factors across the life course continually nourish coercive ideation and criminal predispositions, thereby placing these individuals at risk for chronic criminality. Eventually, these offenders will reproduce their experiences in a subsequent generation of youths.

Breaking this cycle, Colvin contended, will require a "theory-driven response." On a broad level, Colvin favors creating a less coercive society in which people's human needs are given priority by government policies. Moving in this direction requires the political will to implement a range of supportive social programs (see also Colvin, Cullen, & Vander Ven, 2002; Cullen, Wright, & Chamlin, 1999; Currie, 1998b). These might include, for example, programs to help individuals facing crises such as joblessness and homelessness, programs to help parents raise children more effectively, universal Head Start programs, early intervention programs with youths at risk for crime, more commitment to public education, efforts to make work environments less harsh and more democratic, and a criminal justice system that stresses crime prevention, fairness, restoration, and rehabilitation.

Assessing Differential Coercion Theory. In *Crime and Coercion*, Colvin (2000) marshals evidence supporting the various links on his causal model (see also Vander Ven & Colvin, 2013). Empirical tests of this perspective, however, are needed. Even so, beginning evidence across different social contexts exists that is supportive of coercion theory. Thus, based on a sample of 2,472 middle-school students, Unnever, Colvin, and Cullen (2004) provide evidence consistent with core propositions of differential coercion theory. They found that as predicted by the theory, exposure to coercive environments increased self-reported delinquency and that these effects were mediated by social-psychological deficits. Similarly, based on a sample of 300 homeless street youths ages 16 to 24 in Toronto, Baron (2009) discovered that a multidimensional measure of coercion predicted involvement in violent offenses. In line with Colvin's theory, the direct effect of coercion on violence was partially mediated by low self-control, anger, coercive modeling, and coercive ideation. A subsequent study by Baron (2015) on another sample (n = 400) of street youths in Toronto yielded similar results. Finally, Listwan and colleagues have shown that more coercive prison environments decrease released offenders' psychological well-being and increase their recidivism (Listwan, Colvin, Hanley, & Flannery, 2010; Listwan, Sullivan, Agnew, Cullen, & Colvin, 2013). In fact, research consistently reveals that coercive correctional interventions are ineffective and can lead to increases in reoffending (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Cochran, Mears, & Bates, 2013; Cullen & Jonson, 2017).

Beyond Control: Cullen's Social Support Theory

The Invention of Social Support Theory. When Francis T. Cullen was a graduate student in the 1970s at Columbia University, he entered criminology through his mentorship by Richard Cloward, the noted coauthor of *Delinquency and Opportunity* (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). In fact,

Cullen's (1984) dissertation, subsequently published as a book, was a theoretical extension of Cloward's (1959) concept of illegitimate means to criminological theories generally. While at Columbia, however, he also befriended Bruce Link, a fellow classmate and tennis partner who would become a leading medical sociologist. Through his association with Link, his interest in labeling theory deepened (Cullen & Cullen, 1978) as they joined together to conduct studies focusing on stigma and the mentally ill (see, e.g., Link, Cullen, Frank, & Wozniak, 1987; Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, & Dohrenwend, 1989; for an application to crime, see Krohn, Lopes, & Ward, 2014). It was also through Link that Cullen became familiar with research that examined how stress is a source of psychopathology. As part of this paradigm, scholars examined as well how *social support* might lessen mental symptoms, either directly or by buffering the effects of stress. Social support theory emerged as a major perspective across a number of areas (see, e.g., House, 1981; Lin, Dean, & Ensel, 1986; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1996; Vaux, 1988). The theory remains a vibrant framework in the health field and beyond today (Thoits, 2011).

Although he contemplated the possibility for some time, Cullen did not initially apply the concept of social support to the explanation of crime. Instead, he had an interest in a topic that had emerged in criminal justice and in occupational sociology—the stress experienced by workers. In a series of studies with Link and others, he explored how social support influenced different forms of stress experienced by correctional and police officers (see, e.g., Cullen, Lemming, Link, & Wozniak, 1985; Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985). It was not until 1994 when the opportunity arose to deliver his presidential address to the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences that Cullen believed that he was fully prepared to set forth a theory of social support and crime. He was not the only scholar to argue that social support was implicated in criminal conduct; others did so independently at the same time (see, in particular, Drennon-Gala, 1994, 1995). Still, Cullen's version had the advantage of being published in a prominent forum, *Justice Quarterly*, and of articulating the theory systematically in a set of core propositions. He also elaborated his theory in several subsequent publications (Colvin et al., 2002; Cullen et al., 1999; Cullen & Wright, 1997; Wright & Cullen, 2001; Wright, Cullen, & Wooldredge, 2000). His theory has been cited frequently and tested in a number of studies (Makarios & Sams, 2013).

Although rooted originally in the stress paradigm of health outcomes, Cullen's social support theory was also formulated as a *rejection of control perspectives* and the image of social life they conveyed. In his view, control theory reduced the human experience to internal feelings of self-denial and to external relations marked by surveillance and punishment. Humans were transformed into joyless creatures, and relationships were robbed of any sense of love and mutual affection. As a parent, husband, friend, and colleague, this caricature of life struck Cullen as offering an impoverished, truncated view of reality—as not reflecting what he experienced in his daily interactions. Controls might shape individuals' decisions, but life was about far more than being governed by dreary, frustrating restraints that blocked evil desires lurking just below the surface. Social concern for others also was fundamental to the human condition (Agnew, 2014). Daily life was filled with instances in which people cared about one another and helped one another out. Parents hugged and kissed their kids; teachers imparted knowledge and encouraged their students to go to college; friends lent a sympathetic ear and talked for hours on the phone after the painful end to a relationship; and government officials helped the poor to apply for food stamps and to obtain housing. In short, to Cullen, social support is woven into the very fabric of the social system.

More broadly, by focusing on defects in humans and in their social conditions, criminologists had a blind spot when theorizing about how *good things in society* might lessen the risk of crime. Perhaps because health outcomes involve care by physicians and psychotherapists, the significance of providing assistance—social support—was more obvious to medical sociologists such as Bruce Link (see also Thoits, 2011). Cullen argued that the concept of social support was important not just to the physically and mentally ill but generally in society—and thus that it also needed to be carefully integrated into criminological thinking. His ambitions in this regard were modest. He thought it was foolish to propose a general theory of crime claiming to explain all criminal behavior and that all other perspectives were wrong. Instead, he saw his social support approach more, to

use Merton's (1968) term, as a "middle-range theory" that identified a concept that could help to organize the study of crime in a new way. The goal thus was not to tear down rival theories but to illuminate how social support might enrich our understanding of crime causation.

Theoretical Propositions. Social support is the provision of assistance to another person. Usually, the concept is divided into two types: instrumental and expressive (Lin, 1986; Vaux, 1988). Instrumental support is envisioned as giving someone the resources needed to reach a goal. This might range from paying a child's college tuition or helping a friend find a job to filling in as a babysitter during a crisis or training a youngster to be a good tennis player. Expressive support might involve boosting a child's self-esteem after a failure, listening to a friend express anger and frustration, or hugging someone to validate the person's worth and identity. Social support can be objective and perceived, be delivered by informal or formal (government) sources, and exist at the micro and macro levels (Cullen, 1994).

In his 1994 address, Cullen set forth 14 propositions. It is possible, however, to reduce these to three core assertions. First, *social support reduces crime*. All other factors being equal, individuals who receive more support and communities (or nations) with more support will experience less criminal conduct.

Second, *social support makes control more effective*. Control, whether applied by parents or the criminal justice system, occurs in a social context. Ample evidence exists that control is most effective when it is exerted as part of a supportive as opposed to a detached or punitive relationship. For example, parenting tends to be more effective when it is not only restrictive but also warm (often called authoritative parenting) (see Wright & Cullen, 2001). Sampson and colleagues' (1997) theory of collective efficacy includes not only the willingness to exert informal control but also the expectation among neighbors that they can trust one another to be supportive. And Braithwaite's (1989) shaming theory (see Chapter 7 in this volume) argues that shaming is effective in reducing crime only if it is supportive or reintegrative rather than rejecting and stigmatizing. Similarly, Lawrence Sherman's (1993; see Chapter 7 in this volume) defiance theory links crime to controls applied in a disrespectful or nonsupportive fashion and to people who, due to a lack of social bonds, experience few supportive relations in their lives. Further, even with genetic factors controlled, a study using the Add Health data on twin pairs revealed that social support had a causal impact on increasing levels of self-control (Beaver, Boutwell, & Barnes, 2014).

These insights have obvious policy implications. As noted, there is mounting evidence that punitive, nonsupportive correctional interventions do not lower recidivism. Reducing crime is a complex enterprise that must address a number of causal factors (e.g., changing antisocial attitudes in offenders). Nonetheless, social support remains an essential ingredient in programs that seek to change offenders' criminality. Effective rehabilitation involves an ethic of care and the delivery of concrete human services directed at helping offenders to think prosocially and to assume conventional social roles. Being mean—whether that involves throwing people into harsh prisons or threatening them to scare them straight—simply does not work to decrease recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Cullen & Jonson, 2017).

Third, *social support reduces crime by increasing prosocial and decreasing antisocial influences*. Social support is not a single, autonomous factor but rather an activity that permeates many facets of life. As a result, it is implicated in crime causation in many ways. Here are six ways social support limits criminal involvement:

1. Social support contributes to the healthy development of infants and children. Support given to at-risk mothers during pregnancy can limit neuropsychological deficits related to life-course-persistent offending (Moffitt, 1993; Olds, 2007). Supportive parenting nurtures children and avoids practices that are criminogenic (e.g., harsh or abusive child rearing). As noted, supportive parenting also contributes to the development of children's self-control (Beaver et al., 2014).

2. The delivery of support is a conduit for prosocial learning. It is a form of differential association that models prosocial behavior and reinforces conventional attitudes (e.g., the value of helping, not harming, others; empathy for others' problems).

3. Social support builds social bonds that tie people to the conventional order. Parental expressive support facilitates children's attachment. Instrumental support provides others with access to educational and occupational opportunities, thus increasing commitment.

4. Social support insulates against strain, preventing its effects from being felt intensely or, if experienced, by serving as a factor increasing noncriminal coping (Agnew, 2006b; Cullen & Wright, 1997). In this sense, social support might be considered as a "social 'fund' from which people may draw when handling stressors" (Thoits, 1995, p. 64).

5. Social support reduces the stigmatizing effects of criminal labeling. It can foster positive identities among offenders, encouraging them to envision a good life (see Maruna, 2001). It also is integral to reentry programs that seek to help offenders return to society and assume prosocial roles.

6. On the macro level, social support fosters government social welfare policies, cultural values, and community integration that help to diminish the effects of the root causes of crime (e.g., concentrated disadvantage). Supportive nations and communities focus on human needs and do not consign individuals to dealing with personal and social troubles on their own.

Assessing Social Support Theory. Voluminous empirical evidence accumulated over the past three decades confirms that a lack of social support is related to negative health and behavioral outcomes, including antisocial or criminal conduct (see Barrera & Li, 1996; Cullen & Wright, 1997, pp. 194–195; Thoits, 2011; Vaux, 1988). With regard to crime, Makarios and Sams (2013) have conducted the most systematic analysis of the quantitative literature. Their review of 14 micro-level studies revealed that "a substantial amount of empirical evidence suggests that social support is related to individual criminal involvement" (2013, p. 176). Although the results were more mixed, their review of 21 studies concluded that "the majority of macro-level tests" also showed that social support is inversely associated with crime rates (p. 179; see also Pratt & Cullen, 2005). Notably, recent studies have continued to provide evidence showing that social support, either directly or indirectly through other factors (e.g., self-control, social bonds), reduces a range of negative outcomes, from prison misconduct to criminal behavior, among diverse samples (see, e.g., Baron, 2015; Dong & Krohn, 2017; Woo et al., 2016).

Despite these promising findings, empirical analyses of social support theory remain in their infancy. Social support is a multifaceted concept whose effects are likely complex, shaped by structural conditions and operating through social psychological processes (Thoits, 2011; Vaux, 1988). Most criminological tests of the theory employ scales of a few items that measure, at most, limited facets of social support. These works are instructive, but the next generation of research must probe more carefully the diverse ways that social support is implicated in crime causation (see, e.g., Brezina & Azimi, 2018).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEORY: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Unlike some of the other theories examined in this book, control theory has tended to reinforce the sorts of prevention and intervention efforts that have been around for decades and that to many have become a matter of "common sense" (Empey, 1982, p. 268). It is worth noting, however, that the Durkheimian heritage has emphasized prevention through the strengthening of the institutions of socialization rather than through a policy of deterrence relying primarily on fear of getting caught. And it is important to stress that control theory has suggested that regulation of the individual must come through policies fostering integration into the social order rather than through policies of isolation and punishment. That is, these perspectives teach us that attempts to reduce crime by "get tough" laws and harsh penalties—that is, through *state punitive control*—are unlikely to be effective because they do little to establish any self-control and social bonds that insulate against offending.

The control theories we have examined have less to say about the prevention and control of professional crime, organized crime, and corporate and white-collar crime than about prevention and control of juvenile delinquency or ordinary street crime. With respect to prevention, they provide considerable support for programs to strengthen families, particularly with respect to effective child rearing. These efforts often are labeled *early intervention programs*.

These programs often target parent-child attachment for improvement, because weakened bonds are a risk factor for misconduct. To the extent that such programs focus on development of self-control, they stress the need for policies that assist the family in inculcating the favorable self-concepts, impulse control, and frustration tolerance that can keep people out of trouble even in situations of weak external control.

School programs also have been developed that specifically target the need to establish youngsters' bonds to school who are at risk of academic failure and a lack of educational commitment. A range of successful results have been reported (Catalano, Arthur, Hawkins, Berglund, & Olson, 1998; Hawkins & Herrenkohl, 2003; Lösel & Bender, 2003). For example, the Seattle Social Development Project was "designed specifically to prevent antisocial behaviour by promoting academic achievement and commitment to schooling during the elementary grades" (Hawkins & Herrenkohl, 2003, p. 268). This intervention used multiple methods to improve the ability of students to learn and to solve problems without resorting to anger and aggression, of teachers to manage behavior and instruct effectively, and of parents to support their children's learning. The intervention increased school achievement and commitment and in turn reduced both the initiation of delinquency and violence in the teenage years (Hawkins & Herrenkohl, 2003).

Control theory suggests prevention and reintegration policies moving adults into stable social networks of employment and community activities, but less has been done here than with programs for youths. Control theory also suggests a search for policies capable of demonstrating the payoff of hard work toward conventional goals to draw both adolescents and adults into positions of personal commitment in which there is too much of a stake in conformity to lose by a return to delinquency or crime. Unfortunately, such programs tended to become casualties of the shifting political climate of the 1980s and 1990s and the popularity of "get tough" policies. More recently, however, there has been an inmate "reentry movement" that is illuminating the consequences of severing the ties of offenders from families, community, and work. Part of this agenda is thus the call to explore ways to foster social bonds that promote prosocial behavior (see, e.g., Travis, 2005).

Control theories are most impressive to the extent that a person accepts the larger social structure and conventional middle-class values as things to be taken for granted. For control theory, the systems that are to accomplish the regulation of the individuals at risk for crime and delinquency through their integration almost always are systems defined in conventional middle-class terms. Interestingly enough, this seems true even of approaches such as Hagan's power-control theory, in which the egalitarian family really is the new ideal of the middle class, although it is true that this approach faces up to the possibility that the freedom gained by daughters in such families actually may represent a weakening of control. The larger question is the following: What if all of these systems themselves (e.g., families, schools), or at least some of them, are part of the problem rather than the solution? Integration into a "bad" system may be worse than no integration at all. As we will see in Chapters 7 and 8, some criminological theorists have argued that the major problems are indeed located in the conventional systems themselves and that these systems, rather than the particular criminals or delinquents, are the major sources of crime and delinquency. Labeling theorists insist that the conventional systems tend to aggravate crime and delinquency by overreacting to minor nonconformity, whereas conflict theorists maintain that these systems really are covert instruments of oppression masquerading as helpful agencies of desirable socialization.

Even if one is convinced that conventional institutions, such as the middle-class family and the school, do not create major problems through a tendency to reject and stigmatize those who do not fit into them well and are not instruments of social oppression, it does not follow that successful

integration and regulation functions will solve crime and delinquency problems. Speaking of impoverished African Americans, for example, Empey (1982) remarked, "It is not merely that underclass children are sometimes in conflict with their parents, or that their academic achievement is low, but that they are caught in an economic and political system in which they are superfluous" (p. 299). If the basic problem is located in the larger sociopolitical order, then how can policies focused on strengthening families and schools do much to prevent and control crime and delinquency in the long run? Is the sociopolitical order to be accepted as it is, in which case policy must be directed toward inculcating values that support it? Or must more basic policies be developed that challenge some of the assumptions on which the conventional order is based? The labeling theorists and conflict theorists to be examined in Chapters 7 and 8 have focused our attention on just such issues.

CONCLUSION

It is instructive to note that the control theories that focus on explaining juvenile delinquency tend to locate control influences primarily in the family and secondarily in the school and that those theories that focus on adult crime tend to put greater emphasis on inner factors such as self-concept and self-control. Although juveniles might be influenced less by internal factors than by social forces such as peer pressures and parental control, internal factors might be more important in raising the odds of conformity on the part of the adult out of school and away from family supervision. In short, the adult is more on his or her own in the world, complete with a character structure that presumably is crystallized more fully. The relative mix and impact of internal and external control across the life course is an issue that warrants further investigation.

Even though they vary somewhat in their stress on particular forces of integration and regulation and in their attachment to a social disorganization perspective, the theories covered in the past two chapters share certain similarities beyond the fact that they all take the control perspective. Reckless's stress on *goal orientation* sounds very much like the emphasis that Hirschi placed on *commitment* in his earlier sociologically oriented social bond theory. Both theories consider legitimate aspirations to be a crucial factor in insulating a potential deviant from nonconformity. Reckless's concept of *norm erosion* as the obverse of norm retention is closely related to Sykes and Matza's concept of *techniques of neutralization* in such a way that the latter can easily be subsumed as one aspect of the former (Ball, 1966). In much the same way, Reiss's distinction between conformity as a consequence of *acceptance* and conformity as a consequence of *submission* is quite similar to Nye's distinction between *internalized control* and *direct control*. Gottfredson and Hirschi's psychologically oriented *self-control* theory shows considerable similarity to Reckless's notion of *inner containment*, albeit with a much more systematic theory of how such control may fail to develop. Hagan's power-control theory reads in some ways like an update of Nye's perspective in terms of U.S. families during the late 1980s as compared to the more patriarchal families of the 1950s. There also is an overlap between Tittle's concept of a *control deficit* and Colvin's focus on *coercion*. And with a few contemporary exceptions (e.g., the works of Hagan and Colvin), these theories share a Durkheimian stamp and remain largely silent on issues of how power and inequality influence the quality and impact of social control. These issues will occupy our attention in the chapters ahead.

FURTHER READINGS

Source: F. T. Cullen, & P. Wilcox. (Eds.). (2010). *Encyclopedia of Criminological Theory.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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