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SOCIAL CONTROL
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THEORIES OF
CRIME AND DEVIANCE

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Social Control and Self-Control Theories of Crime and Deviance

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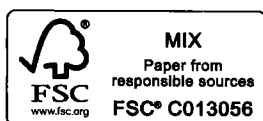
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Series Preface

Because of its pervasive nature in our mass mediated culture, many believe they are experts in understanding the reasons why offenders violate the law. Parents and schools come high on the public's list of who to blame for crime. Not far behind are governments and legal systems that are believed to be ineffective at deterring offenders – too many legal protections and too few serious sentences. Some learn how to behave inappropriately as children, while others are said to choose crime because of its apparent high reward/low cost opportunity structure. Yet others hang out with the wrong crowd, or live in the wrong neighborhood, or work for the wrong corporation, and may get their kicks from disobeying rules in the company of like-minded others. A few are seen as evil, insane or just plain stupid. While such popular representations of the causes of crime contain glimpses of the criminological reality, understanding why people commit crime is a much more complex matter. Indeed, for this reason the quest to establish the causes of crime has been one of the most elusive searches confronting humankind.

Since the mid-19th century, following the advent of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, those who sought scientific knowledge to understand crime abandoned philosophical speculation and economic reductionism. In its place they founded the multifaceted interdisciplinary field of criminology. Unlike criminal law and legal theory that explored the logic of prohibitions against offensive behavior, and in contrast to criminal justice that examined the nature and extent of societies' responses to crime through systems of courts, police and penology, criminology's central focus is the systematic examination of the nature, extent and causes of crime. Criminological theory as a subset of criminology, comprises the cluster of explanation seeking to identify the causes or etiology of crime. This *Library of Essays in Theoretical Criminology* is designed to capture the range and depth of the key theoretical perspectives on crime causation.

While there are numerous criminological theories, most can be clustered into 10 or 12 theoretical perspectives. Moreover, each of these broad theoretical frameworks is, itself, rooted in a major academic discipline. The most predominant disciplines influencing criminological theory include: economics, anthropology, biology, psychology, geography, sociology, politics, history, philosophy, as well as the more recent multi-disciplinary fields such as gender studies, critical race studies and postmodernist social theory.

Criminological theories are rarely discrete. Although they often emphasize a particular disciplinary field, they also draw on aspects of other disciplines to strengthen their explanatory power. Indeed, since 1989 a major development in criminological theory has been the emergence of explicitly integrative theoretical approaches (See Gregg Barak, *Integrative Criminology*; Ashgate, 1998). Integrative/interdisciplinary approaches bring together several theories into a comprehensive explanation, usually to address different levels of analysis; these range from the micro-individual and relational approaches common in biology and psychology, to the meso-level institutional explanations that feature in sociological analysis, to the macro-level geographical, political, cultural and historical approaches that deal with

societal and global structures and patterns. Recent developments in criminological theory have seen an acceleration of this trend compared with that of single disciplinary explanations of crime (See Stuart Henry and Scott Lukas, *Recent Developments in Criminological Theory*; Ashgate, 2009).

Although there are now over 20 English-language criminological theory textbooks and numerous edited compilations, there is a need to make available to an international audience a series of books that brings together the best of the available theoretical contributions. The advantage of doing this as a series, rather than a single volume, is that the editors are able to mine the field for the most relevant essays that have influenced the present state of knowledge. Each contribution to the series thus contains many chapters, each on a different aspect of the same theoretical approach to crime causation.

In creating this series I have selected outstanding criminologists whose own theories are discussed as part of the literature and I have asked each of them to select a set of the best journal essays to represent the various facets of their theoretical framework. In doing so, I believe that you will receive the best selection of essays available together with an insightful and comparative overview placing each essay in the context of the history of ideas that comprises our search to better understand and explain crime and those who commit it.

STUART HENRY

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Introduction

Social Control and Self-Control Theories refer to clusters of theoretical positions, related through the work of Travis Hirschi, that indicate the presence or absence of control to be the major factor in explaining why some people offend while others do not. According to such theorists, offenders lack external social controls, internal self- or personal controls, or both.

Early Developments in Social Control Theory

While most of the ideas found in Social Control Theory have been part of theoretical and practical thinking about crime for centuries, the formulation of these ideas into a separate and distinct theoretical framework is a recent development in criminology. The published work leading to what is referred to as Social Control Theory appeared in the second half of the twentieth century, with the initial formative steps occurring in the 1950s and 1960s. For many criminologists, Social Control Theory began with Hirschi's publication of *Causes of Delinquency* in 1969. However, strictly speaking, Social Control Theory was introduced in the two decades prior to Hirschi's book as essays began appearing in professional journals challenging the theoretical and practical usefulness of prevailing psychological and sociological motivational theories of crime and arguing for a different theoretical lens. Several of these theorists suggested that patterns in criminal behaviours could be better explained by focusing on variations in social restraints (that is, controls) on people's behaviour rather than on individual social or cultural differences in their motivational impulses or choices.

The new emphasis on restraints rather than on motivations indicates a fundamental change in the assumptions made about 'human nature' and about the 'normality' of deviant behaviours. What sets Social Control Theory apart is its underlying premise that the motivation to engage in socially disapproved behaviours is not mysterious or abnormal, but ordinary and universal. Motivational theories of crime are premised on the assumption that people are, by nature, 'pro-social' – that is, innately social beings who are naturally motivated to conform to social rules and whose impulses or decisions to engage in illegal behaviour is unusual and abnormal. Thus, motivations or decisions to deviate need to be explained, as these factors constitute the critical difference between criminals and noncriminals.

In contrast, social control theorists assume that people are, by nature, asocial (or antisocial) – that is, naturally hedonistic, amoral, selfish beings who pursue individual pleasure or gain. From this theoretical position, impulses to engage in antisocial behaviours are common and do not distinguish reliably between criminals and noncriminals. Instead, they argue that the critical difference between those who commit crimes and those who do not must be in the presence of restraints on their impulses to antisocial behaviours, and therefore, attempts to explain or prevent crime must center on this critical difference.

Notably, all of the early efforts (and almost all of the subsequent efforts) at developing Social Control Theory are analyses of *juvenile delinquency*, giving little explicit attention to whether

these same processes apply beyond adolescence or to other forms of crime such as corporate, white collar, or state crime. On its face, Social Control Theory represents a very broad and general perspective on human behaviour; there is nothing specifically in its assumptions and premises that should limit it to adolescence. Yet, the systematic application of Social Control Theory to adult criminality does not occur until the last decade of the twentieth century, most notably in the 'life course' adaptation of Social Control Theory developed by Sampson and Laub (see Chapter 21).

This book is divided into four sections, the first of which focuses on the major contributors to the early developmental stage of Social Control Theory as a major perspective in criminological thinking. These essays appeared in professional journals during the initial two decades that laid much of the conceptual groundwork for Hirschi's systematic formulation of these ideas into Social Control Theory in his 1969 book *Causes of Delinquency*. Although there are some differences in emphasis among authors of books on criminological theory, the five essays in this section are generally regarded (for example, see Akers and Sellers, 2009; Bernard et al., 2010) as the formative 'early classic' statements of Social Control Theory. They demonstrate the basic criticisms of traditional motivational theories of crime, express strong questions about the ability of such theories to explain the empirically reported patterns in criminal behaviours, and argue that an alternative perspective focused on variations in social controls would provide more valid and useful explanations of criminal and delinquent behaviours. While they introduce the basic premises, ideas, and arguments of a social control perspective, they do not systematically assemble them into an explicit, coherent theoretical model, which came later in Hirschi (1969). Interestingly, note that Hirschi subsequently dissociated himself from the concept of 'social control' (see Part III) and moved toward a 'self-control' theoretical model (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

Development of Social Control Theory as a distinct criminological perspective is generally traced to the 1951 paper by Albert Reiss reproduced here as Chapter 1. Reiss argues for examining juvenile delinquency from a new theoretical focus that reconceptualizes delinquency as 'the failure of personal and social controls' (instead of the development of abnormal motivations or attitudes). The motive in proposing a new analytical framework is practical – the need for an effective predictive framework to identify those adjudicated delinquents that are likely to commit crimes while on probation. After empirically evaluating different approaches to predicting criminal recidivism, Reiss concludes that juvenile delinquency is not well predicted (or explained) by examining unusual indicators of delinquent motivations or personal dispositions. Instead, recidivism is more efficiently predicted by refocusing on the presence or absence of behavioural restraints in juveniles' lives.

In classifying the restraints on delinquency, Reiss makes an important distinction between *personal controls* and *social controls*. The former refer to individuals' own abilities to impose self-restraint on their actions through the internalization of social norms and rules that govern legally appropriate behaviour. The latter type of restraints – social controls – represents all other constraints on behaviours that are externally imposed by social groups, institutions, and neighbourhood conditions. Reiss's description of the content of personal controls is suggestive but vague, being expressed in ambiguous, tautological terms such as 'mature ego ideals', 'non-delinquent social roles' and 'flexible ego-controls'. These reflect his reliance on juvenile court data consisting of psychiatric diagnostic statistics maintained by court-appointed psychiatric and social work staff. Reiss's description of external social controls is also quite brief, mainly

representing those objective features of juveniles' family and residential circumstances (for example, family composition, economic circumstances, and neighbourhood conditions) that are readily available in juvenile case records and juvenile court statistics. Reiss hypothesized that the most effective predictor variables for delinquent recidivism will be those items reflecting weakness of personal controls and the absence of external social controls operating through family, peers, neighbourhood, and community institutions.

As the introduction of an alternative perspective, Chapter 1 does not explicitly lay out a fully developed theory of social control. Reiss's motives are pragmatic rather than theoretical; his data analysis is restricted to the categories of official juvenile court records. As a result, some key premises of social control are merely implied rather than explicitly spelled out – for example, the assumption that delinquent motivations are universal and natural. Moreover, the central distinction between personal and social controls remains fairly undeveloped.

Six years after Reiss's initial essay, two additional essays appeared that added further detail to the conceptual structure of Social Control Theory. A 1957 essay by Jackson Toby (Chapter 2) presents a broader and intentionally more theoretical focus than Reiss's pragmatic assessment of recidivism predictors to explain two notable patterns of juvenile crime. Toby explained (1) the high incidence of predatory property crime in the US, despite the high level of material wealth and standard of living, and (2) the concentration of predatory crimes among adolescents in slum neighbourhoods where crimes are mostly petty, impulsive and crudely executed. Toby argues that both patterns are inconsistent with the conventional motivational explanations of criminal behaviours based on economic deprivation and subcultural strains, which would imply more systematic, organized kinds of offences.

Toby's argument for Social Control Theory is more sociological and shifts the main emphasis from personal controls emphasized by Reiss to external social controls present in neighbourhoods and other social environments. Toby's premise is simple: 'people are more prone to act upon their anti-social impulses when external controls over them are weak' (p. 15). Toby also makes explicit what Reiss only implies: delinquents are not substantially different from non-delinquents in their motivations, since most delinquent behaviours are natural and ordinary. The difference between delinquents and non-delinquents must be the availability or absence of external controls in their schools, families, and neighbourhoods.

Beyond explaining neighbourhood differences in crime rates, Toby also seeks to explain why some youth in crime-prone neighbourhoods commit crimes while others in the same neighbourhood do not. Toby attributes the differences to the adolescents' commitments to conventional, law-abiding activity, reflecting on what they have to gain or lose by being identified as delinquent. Toby coins the phrase 'having a stake in conformity' to describe the personal investment of self that will be forfeited or endangered by getting into trouble. Persons with less to lose in being identified as delinquents will be freer to engage in predatory behaviour when circumstances make it available and appealing. Those with a lot to lose have stronger reason to suppress their predatory impulses. Thus, Toby's argument that 'youngsters vary in the extent to which they feel a stake in American society' seeks to explain both variations in predatory crime rates across neighbourhoods or communities and variations in the incidence of predatory behaviour across individuals within particular neighbourhoods or groups. He also implicitly relies on a model of humans as rational, cost-benefit calculators who weigh the advantages and disadvantages of their actions on their self-interests, which would prove to be an enduring assumption of theorists sharing this perspective.

Toby's 1957 essay notably expands and extends Reiss' theoretical model and spells out more clearly the underlying premises of a social control perspective, especially the motivational assumption of Social Control Theory that impulses to commit delinquent, criminal, and anti-social behaviours are universal and natural. Importantly, Toby's essay also shifts theoretical attention away from internalized personal attributes (for example, Reiss's ego-strength) to social connections and attachments to larger networks, neighbourhoods, and institutions. In the process, Toby explicitly links Social Control Theory at a personal level to Social Disorganization Theory at a macro-structural level, effectively anticipating the insights of Ruth Kornhauser (1978) twenty years later.

In Chapter 3, Gresham Sykes and David Matza also challenge the popular sociological theory that higher delinquency rates were explained by subcultural value systems that prescribe a commitment to illegal behaviours. According to such 'subcultural deviance' theories, crimes are not individual deviant acts; rather, they are acts of individual conformity to the subcultural codes in some groups that encourage law-breaking behaviour as bold, risk-taking, authority-defying, respect-winning actions. In subcultural deviance theories, delinquents and criminals are not different kinds of people (with different abnormal motivations) but rather ordinary people living in different kinds of groups conforming to unconventional or subcultural value systems. Sykes and Matza argue that, while widely popular among sociological criminologists, such theories are not supported by the available empirical research on juvenile delinquents, consistently showing that delinquents do *not* have distinctively different values from non-delinquents. Instead, those data reveal that delinquents tend to value the same things, and to agree that behaviours should be guided by these same conventional values.

However, Sykes and Matza observed that the controlling impact of conventional values or norms may be weakened to allow otherwise immoral and illegal acts to occur, without sanctions, by the use of 'neutralizations' – rationalizations, excuses, and moralizing explanations that suspend legal or moral rules in particular situations and allow the actors to choose actions that otherwise would result in condemnation or prosecution. Such neutralizations, comprising words and phrases, are socially learned and shared verbal accounts that provide a plausible situational reinterpretation of otherwise illegal acts (for example: "It wasn't my fault. They pressured me to do it"; 'It wasn't the real me. I was drunk at the time'; 'I was only taking back what was rightfully mine'). Rather than after-the-fact excuses, Sykes and Matza stress that neutralizations *prepare* actors to carry out the law-violating action and morally free them to act without feeling guilty.

Sykes and Matza also stress that these shared neutralizations are an integral part of the conventional moral order and are not elements of distinct deviant subcultures (see Matza and Sykes, 1961). Unlike the 'criminal codes' of delinquent subcultures, neutralizations are not causal variables. Rather, they increase the likelihood that illegal behaviours will be chosen by weakening conventional restraints on individuals and allowing individuals to act on their impulses or reasoned decisions to commit illegal acts by nullifying the moral inhibitions that would otherwise restrain them. Thus, Sykes and Matza clarify the causal indeterminism that is a central tenet of Social Control Theory. The insights from Neutralization Theory have become an important part of the modern Social Control framework. They explain how normally effective social controls may be weakened or negated in some groups or individuals and how people otherwise operating in the pursuit of ordinary motives can commit such

illegal behaviours. Such temporary or situational freedoms from moral controls were later described by Matza (1964) as a 'moral holiday'.

Chapter 4, by Walter Reckless, presents a highly personalized version of social control labeled *Containment Theory*. In principle, states Reckless, 'Containment Theory is an explanation of both conforming behaviour as well as deviance' (p. 29). However, both this essay and his subsequent textbook, *The Problem of Crime* (1967), largely present containment as a 'middle range' theory for explaining the vast majority of ordinary-but-illegal behaviours that occur involving no unusual motivational impulses or organized role performances. Reckless does not presume that everyone experiences exactly the same criminal motivations but acknowledges the differential 'pushes and pulls toward delinquency' that are variably present in the life-worlds of adolescents living in different families, neighbourhoods, and communities. However, beyond making an occasional reference to 'pushes and pulls toward crime,' Reckless provides little conceptual consideration of motivational variations—the ways motives or decisions are shaped by controls or constraints.

Following Reiss (Chapter 1), Reckless here distinguishes clearly between internal and external sources of control. In the creative vocabulary of Containment Theory, these are referred to as 'inner buffers' and 'outer buffers'; and also like Reiss, Reckless assigns primary theoretical importance to internal or personal controls. Reckless even quantifies this preference for internal over external controls in the form of a '4 to 1 causal law', asserting that the explanation of delinquency control should be 'four parts individual and one part situational' (p. 31).

Reckless presents Containment Theory ambitiously as 'a new theory of delinquency and crime', yet it clearly derives its ideas from a variety of prior sources, particularly from early control theories to which it gives new labels (for example, inner and outer buffers) but does not add much new content. In aspiring to be a general theory of behaviour, Containment Theory incorporates a variety of additional materials from other theoretical perspectives. As a result, it becomes a more eclectic mixture of ideas and less clearly defined as a Social Control Theory. In explaining the central content of 'inner buffers' against crime, Reckless heavily emphasizes 'the self factor', which refers to a broadly defined assortment of loosely related concepts such as self-identity, sense of self-control, super-ego development, resistance-to-frustration, attribution-of-responsibility, goal-directedness, and effective ego-defence mechanisms. These sound very similar to Reiss's similarly vague description of personal controls. The emphasis on the 'self factor' in Containment Theory added a new and innovative element to social control, one that was especially appealing in the 1960s when research on the self-concept was very popular. However, Reckless's conceptualization of the 'self factor' is too broadly inclusive, loosely connected, and vaguely defined to be very helpful either in subsequent empirical research or delinquency control policy. While the 'self factor' was too vaguely defined to be rigorously researched, it clearly emphasized 'impulse-control' as a central component of the important 'inner buffer' against delinquency. In this way, Containment Theory may be said to anticipate the development of Self-Control Theory by Gottfredson and Hirschi some thirty years later.

Chapter 5, by Scott Briar and Irving Piliavin presents the strongest and most explicit case through the mid-1960s for Social Control Theory as a distinct perspective for explaining delinquent behaviours. Echoing Matza (1964), these authors strongly argue that popular motivational theories of delinquency focusing on psychological dispositions or social cultural

conditions over-predict (a) the prevalence of delinquency, because many adolescents with purported crime-predisposing characteristics do not commit criminal acts or become juvenile delinquents, and (b) the longevity of delinquency involvement, because they cannot account for the 'aging out' pattern in juvenile crime in which most offenders desist as they mature into adulthood. Also, the popular theories under-predict delinquency by accounting for only a small fraction of the deviance that does occur – that is, the criminal actions of a deviant subpopulation.

Briar and Piliavin drew attention to the episodic, situational, and instrumental nature of most delinquent acts, which make them better explained by the social situations in which they occur than in the personal characteristics of the delinquents themselves. Following Matza (1964), Briar and Piliavin also emphasized the probabilistic (and non-deterministic) perspective on delinquent behaviours that social control theories invariably entail – that is, weak social controls increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour (rather than causing it) if the impulses are strong enough and opportunities are available. A variation on this tripartite causal nexus later constitutes routine activities theory (motivated offender, suitable victim/target, and absence of a capable guardian/control).

In their essay, Briar and Piliavin argue that prior accounts of social control have not explained the universality of motivations to delinquent behaviours, and they have not fully identified the principal social sources or operation of restraint on criminal impulses. On the first point, Briar and Piliavin note that most criminal behaviours are 'typically episodic, purposive, and confined to certain situations' (p. 36). They are situationally induced responses reflecting ordinary, situationally induced motivations 'to obtain valued goods, to portray courage in the presence of, or be loyal to peers, to strike out at someone who is disliked, or simply to "get kicks"' (ibid.).

The major sources of social restraints on behaviour are found in 'commitment to the conventional order', reflecting the premise that individuals restrain themselves mainly not through fear of legal punishment but through the fear of loss of personal relationships, memberships, reputations and investments in valued social activities (again, the cost/benefit, rationally calculating, self-interested actor is invoked). While the concept of *commitment to conformity* was introduced to Social Control Theory a decade earlier by Reiss and especially Toby, Briar and Piliavin argue that development of Social Control Theory requires a fuller description of this central idea. However, it was Hirschi's (1969) work, four years later, that developed this idea most fully by elaborating the idea of 'the social bond' into its key behavioural components, notably the elements of *attachment* and *commitment*.

Consistent with virtually all other social control theorists, Briar and Piliavin assert that the family is the most important of all the relationships and memberships in which youth are embedded, especially the relationships of youth to their parents upon which other kinds of commitments (for example, peers, school, church) may be contingent. They note that the effectiveness of these relationships as social controls on behaviour is a dynamic process, which will vary over time as children mature and experience age-related shifts in social expectations and opportunities. Although Briar and Piliavin do not expand or develop this idea, it suggests a valuable expansion of Social Control Theory beyond adolescent delinquency to adult criminality. Thus, it faintly presages the subsequent extension of Social Control Theory into a Life-Span framework, a perspective developed most fully by Sampson and Laub (Chapter 20; 1993) in their 'age-graded theory of informal social control.'

These early essays presented in Part I introduce the core elemental ideas of Social Control Theory, but they do not systematically develop and explicate them into a singular, coherent theoretical framework. That step was accomplished by Hirschi in his 1969 book *Causes of Delinquency*, which still stands as the definitive account of Social Control Theory for most criminologists. However, not included among these essays (because it is a book) is the theoretical 'dark horse' among the early Social Control Theory publications – Ivan Nye's *Family Relationships and Juvenile Delinquency* (1958) which presents a coherent, singular Social Control Theory of juvenile delinquency a decade prior to Hirschi. Indeed, Nye advances the first explicit, well-developed presentation of social control as a formal theory of delinquent behaviour, as well as a detailed empirical test of the theory using self-reported data specifically collected for that task. In this respect, Nye might arguably be called the 'originator' of Social Control Theory, although his work is not nearly as widely known as Hirschi's, nor has it been as widely influential in criminology (however, see Rankin and Wells, 2005).

Sources of Social Control

Much of the earlier criminological research on families as a mechanism of social control involved the impact of 'broken homes' on delinquency (see Wells and Rankin, 1991). Broken homes are generally defined as the loss of at least one biological parent (see Rankin, 1983). Generally, however, the correlations between broken homes and delinquency were inconsistent from one study to the next and no more than modest in size. The relationship between broken homes and delinquency was stronger for minor forms of juvenile misconduct (for example, status offences) and in studies that analysed official or institutional data rather than self-reported delinquency. The statistical association between broken homes and delinquency did not provide a strong enough basis for effective delinquency-prevention strategies.

Rather than concentrate on structural variables such as broken homes and family size as proxies for parental loss of control over children's behaviours, these new wave social control theorists tended to focus on the *quality* of the relationships between various institutions of social control and children. Almost by definition, control theorists' main concerns are the explication and clarification of the techniques, processes, and institutions of informal social control. Indeed, the different versions of social control outlined in the essays in Part I point out the central importance of families, peers and schools in the creation of informal control mechanisms and their link to delinquency. Probably because it is 'relatively explicit, well developed, and amenable to empirical test' (Wells and Rankin, Chapter 7, p. 72), the most widely cited and tested of the various social control models is Hirschi's (1969) version of what others have labelled Social Bond Theory. Kempf's 1993 review of the criminological literature had already found 71 published empirical studies of Hirschi's (1969) theory. Seventeen years later, Regoli et al. (2010, pp. 204–5) found more than 2,000 published articles that referenced the significance of the social bond to behaviour, thereby proclaiming: 'Hirschi's theory is without question the most talked-about and tested theory of delinquency.'

Empirical research is more supportive than it is critical of Hirschi's (1969) version of Social Control Theory (see Shoemaker, 2000; Bernard et al., 2010), and studies have usually found low to moderate empirical support for the theory, most notably for the bonds of *commitment* and *attachment*. Both Nye (1958) and Hirschi (1969) stressed particularly the essential role

that parents play in the socialization of children, but high correlations and levels of explained variance are seldom found in the research literature (Akers and Sellers, 2009). Indeed, Greenberg's (1999) re-analysis of the data from Hirschi's Richmond Youth Study indicates the limited explanatory power of social bond variables on delinquency. Joseph Rankin and Roger Kern (Chapter 6, p. 50) suggested that 'social control theory is probably more incomplete than it is incorrect' and various authors have attempted to clarify and refine its basic tenets. Kempf's (1993) literature review concluded that, while most of the 71 empirical studies she examined found significant correlations between delinquency and at least one element of Hirschi's social bond, many of the authors also suggested some reformulation (for example, better conceptualization of the social bond) of the theory and the use of more rigorous conceptual and/or empirical measures, samples, and statistical techniques to test the theory in a more coherent, systematic and scientific way. Temporal ordering and reciprocal effects, the lack of finding potentially spurious causal factors, lack of generalizability or scope of the theory because of regional and non-representative samples, and the lack of female and older sample subjects are all issues reported by Kempf (1993) and others (for example, Liska and Reed, 1985) that still remain problematic today. Of course, many of these issues and problems are not unique to Social Control Theory.

One empirical and conceptual clarification of Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory involves the number of parent-child attachments. That is, does strong attachment to both parents provide an additional restraint against delinquency vis-à-vis strong attachment to only one parent? Hirschi (1969, p. 104) argued that it did not and concluded from his own analyses that 'knowing attitudes toward both parents adds *nothing* to our ability to predict delinquency'. Since he believed that attachment to one parent was as effective in controlling delinquency as strong attachments to both parents, Hirschi also argued that broken homes should not have an effect on delinquency as long as the child is strongly attached to the lone custodial parent. In the first essay of Part II, Rankin and Kern (Chapter 6) analysed national survey data to directly test these assumptions and found that in homes in which both biological parents are present, strong attachments to both parents are associated with lower delinquency when compared to intact homes in which there is strong attachment to only one parent. Moreover, delinquency is higher among children who are strongly attached to the custodial parent in a broken home when compared to children who are strongly attached to both parents in an intact home. Rankin and Kern conclude their essay by arguing that the association between the number of strong parental attachments and delinquency may at least partially account for the weak but relatively consistent relationship between broken homes and certain types of delinquency.

Until research in the 1980s, Nye's (1958) concept of *direct* parental control had been largely ignored as theoretically and conceptually unimportant relative to indirect parental controls or attachment. It was thought that the utility of direct parental monitoring, supervision and discipline was probably limited, given that most adolescents become autonomous from their parents in adolescence as they simultaneously become more involved in school and peer networks. In Chapter 7, Edward Wells and Joseph Rankin suggest that the empirical and theoretical dismissal of direct parental controls by Nye (1958), Hirschi (1969) and others as a mechanism of social control in favour of parental attachments or indirect controls was premature. Borrowing from earlier research by Patterson (1982), Wells and Rankin here reconceptualized direct parental controls into three component parts: normative regulation, monitoring, and discipline. Based on the magnitude of their correlation coefficients, Wells

and Rankin found that the relationship between direct parental controls (regulation/restriction, strictness, punishment contingency and punitiveness) and delinquency was just as great as that of indirect parental controls or attachments. Moreover, the form of the relationship between direct controls and delinquency was not always simple, linear, or in the expected direction: 'punishment works, but its effects are not generally simple and linear; some punishment is often effective but more is not always better' (p. 89).

Next, Chapter 8, by Håkan Stattin and Margaret Kerr, also exemplifies how Social Control Theory has been clarified conceptually over the years. Here the focus is on parental monitoring (tracking and surveillance of children's behaviours) – a dimension of *attachment* in Hirschi's (1969) Social Bond Theory, an element of *direct* control in Nye's (1958) version of control theory, and a parent management skill in Patterson's (1982) developmental psychology perspective. Similar to other studies (see Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984), increased levels of parental monitoring were associated with lower rates of delinquency among a Swedish sample of 703 fourteen-year-olds. However, Stattin and Kerr argue in their essay that parental monitoring is not really what the concept implies – that is, surveillance that reflects active parental efforts to control and manage children. Rather, their results suggest that monitoring reflects mainly a child's activity to openly communicate and disclose his or her whereabouts and activities to parents. Parents obtain knowledge mainly through willing disclosure or sharing of information from their children rather than from actual surveillance, tracking or active efforts at soliciting information (as the term *monitoring* implies). More concisely, then, it is higher levels of the child's willing disclosure of information that is negatively correlated with delinquency than actual physical, parental 'monitoring'. Thus, open and willing communication between the child and parents seems to be the key issue rather than actual monitoring and physical surveillance of a child's activities. Stattin and Kerr (2000) suggest that calls to increase parental 'monitoring' of their children's behaviours may not have the intended consequence of reducing delinquency, and research should instead focus on trying to understand the factors that determine the child's disclosure of information.

Affectional identification or relationship with friends is another element of Hirschi's (1969) social bond of attachment. According to Hirschi, peer attachment is positively related to conformity regardless of whether or not such friends are involved in delinquency: 'the more one respects or admires one's friends, the less likely one is to commit delinquent acts' (1969, p. 152). However, this theoretical stance has been disputed both by empirical research (for example, Conger, 1976; Elliott et al., 1985; Warr, 2002) and by advocates of Differential Association Theory (Sutherland and Cressey, 1970) and Social Learning Theory (Akers, 1977), both of which propose that attachment to peers does not contribute to conformity unless the peers themselves are conventional. On the other hand, attachment to delinquent peers can weaken society's bond and increase deviant behaviours.

Hirschi also suggests that weak attachments to parents may free adolescents to associate with delinquent peers, thus leading to delinquency. However, most research that has investigated the simultaneous relationships of parents and peers to delinquency found that each has a direct and independent influence on delinquency rather than an indirect or contingent effect (for a summary, see Burfeind and Bartusch, 2006, p. 406).

In Chapter 9, Mark Warr notes that most empirical tests of Hirschi's (1969) version of Social Control Theory analyse only peers *or* parents in isolation rather than statistically examining the two variables together. Using longitudinal data from the 1976 National Youth

Survey, Warr's study examined the *simultaneous* impact of parents and peers on delinquency and found that attachment to parents had an indirect (rather than direct) effect on delinquency. On the other hand, once an adolescent has established delinquent friendships, the indirect effect of parental attachments had little negative impact on delinquency. By contrast, the amount of time adolescents spent with their families had a moderately strong direct and negative effect in counteracting peer influence by reducing or sometimes even eliminating the negative influence of deviant peers on delinquency. Warr calls such controls 'access barriers' because they restrict adolescents' contact with delinquent friends.

Although peers and especially parents are considered primary institutions of social control, the school is also important in the restraint of adolescent behaviours. If youth are insensitive to their teachers' opinions, have a lack of commitment to long-term goals, do poorly in school and are uninterested in completing the difficult work required to achieve conventional success, their behaviours are not restrained by the usual social conventions of school, and they are at greater risk to commit delinquency. Academic achievement (for example, good grades, high test scores) is not only indicative of positive attachment to school (Hirschi, 1969) but also of commitment (to long-term goals of success), involvement (by participating in school-related activities like choir and sports) and belief (in the rules that maintain the school as a conventional institution for learning).

Hirschi (1969) measured school attachment mainly through questions that gauged how much adolescents care about their teachers and how much they like school. In addition, youth with high educational aspirations and those who work hard out of concern for receiving good grades show strong commitment and are less likely to pursue delinquency. Generally, the empirical evidence supports these claims (for example, Rankin, 1980; Cernkovich and Giordano, 1992; Jenkins, 1997), although the direction or temporal order of the causal connection between delinquency and school attachment is in doubt (Agnew, 1985; Liska and Reed, 1985).

More recently, researchers have noted that it is not enough to analyse the relationship between school bonds and delinquency without simultaneously examining the social and organizational contexts in which the students are embedded. *Communal school organization* refers to supportive relationships between and among teachers, administrators, and students, as well as common goals, collaboration, and involvement. 'Schools that are communally organized have more positive student attitudes, better teacher morale', and lead to fewer student behavioural problems because 'supportive relationships, common norms and goals, and greater involvement and participation increase the likelihood that students will become more bonded to school' (Payne et al., 2003, p. 751). In the last essay in this part, Allison Payne (Chapter 10) uses a hierarchical linear modelling statistical technique to conduct multi-level analyses (communal school organization and individual-level school bonds) on a nationally representative sample of more than 13,000 students located in 253 schools in the US. More specifically, she examines whether communal school organization (measured at the school-level) influences the relationship between school bonds and delinquency (measured at the individual-level). In sum, Payne found: (1) students attending communally organized schools are less delinquent than their counterparts in less communally organized schools; (2) students attending communally organized schools are more highly bonded to school than students attending less communally organized schools; (3) students more highly bonded to school are less delinquent than students with low school bonding; and (4) individual student bonding