Chapter 1

Perspectives on Delinquency

Three fundamental perspectives on delinquency and deviant behavior dominate the current scene. According to strain or motivational theories, legitimate desires that conformity cannot satisfy force a person into deviance.\(^1\) According to control or bond theories, a person is free to commit delinquent acts because his ties to the conventional order have somehow been broken.\(^2\) According to cultural deviance theories, the deviant conforms to a set of standards not accepted by a larger or more powerful society.\(^3\) Although most current theories of crime and delinquency contain elements of at least two and occasionally all three of these perspectives,

\(^1\) The purest example of a strain theory, contaminated only rarely by assumptions appropriate to a control theory, is found in Merton's "Social Structure and Anomie" (Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure [New York: The Free Press, 1957], pp. 131-160). One characteristic of strain theory is that the motivation to crime overcomes or eliminates restraints—such as considerations of morality (see also Talcott Parsons, The Social System [New York: The Free Press, 1951], pp. 249-325). Because Merton traces his intellectual history to Durkheim, strain theories are often called "anomic" theories (see Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, Delinquency and Opportunity [New York: The Free Press, 1960], especially pp. 77-143). Actually, Durkheim's theory is one of the purest examples of control theory: both anomie and norm are conditions of "deregulation," and the "aberrant" behavior that follows is an automatic consequence of such deregulation.


\(^3\) I take the term "cultural deviance" from a paper by Ruth Korhauers, "Theoretical Issues in the Sociological Study of Juvenile Delinquency," mimeographed, Center for the Study of Law and Society, Berkeley, 1953. Other terms for theories of this type are "cultural conflict," "transmission," "sub-cultural," and "differential association." The most influential theory of cultural deviance is Sutherland's theory of differential association (see Edwin H. Sutherland and Donald R. Cressey, Principles of Criminology, 7th ed. [Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966], pp. 77-83). See also Walter B. Miller, "Lower
reconciliation of their assumptions is very difficult. If, as the control theorist assumes, the ties of many persons to the conventional order may be weak or virtually nonexistent, the strain theorist, in accounting for their deviance, builds into his explanation pressure that is unnecessary. If, on the other hand, it is reasonable to assume with the strain theorist that everyone is at some point strongly tied to the conventional system, then it is unreasonable to assume that many are not (control theories), or that many are tied to different "conventional" systems (cultural deviance theories).

In the present study I analyze a large body of data on delinquency collected in Western Contra Costa County, California, contrasting throughout the assumptions of the strain, control, and cultural deviance theories. I begin by outlining the assumptions of these theories and discussing the logical and empirical difficulties attributed to each of them. I then draw from many sources an outline of social control theory, the theory that informs the subsequent analysis and which is advocated here.

**Strain Theories**

Strain theories are the historical result of good answers to a bad question. The question was Hobsen's: "Why do men obey the rules of society?" Although the Hobbesian question is granted a central place in the history of sociological theory, few have accepted the Hobbesian answer: "Of all passions, that which inclineth men least to break the laws, is fear. Nay, excepting some generous natures, it is the only thing, when there is appearance of profit or pleasure by breaking the laws, that makes men keep them." 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. He feels morally obligated to conform, whether or not it is to his advantage to do so. As if this were not enough to show that Hobbes was wrong, the sociologist added yet another powerful source of conformity: "People are . . . profoundly sensitive to the expectations of others." Now, since others almost by definition expect one to conform, deviation can occur only at great cost to the deviator.

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. Clearly, if men desire to conform, they must be under great pressure before they will resort to deviance. In the classic strain theories, this pressure is provided by legitimate desires. A man desires success, for example, as everyone tells him he should, but he cannot attain success conforming to the rules; consequently, in desperation, he turns to deviant behavior or crime to attain that which he considers rightfully his. The theoretical assumption that man is moral and the empirical fact that he violates rules in which he believes are thus made consistent.

Examples of this perspective are numerous:

9. There was a more or less conscious attempt in one period of American sociology to avoid the evil-causes-evil "fallacy." Vices were consequently traced to prior virtues or to virtuous institutions: for example, crime to ambition, prostitution to marriage. The most sophisticated spokesman for this good-causes-evil view is Albert K. Cohen (see, for example, his "Multiple Factor Approaches" in Marvin E. Wolfgang et al., eds., The Sociology of Crime and Delinquency [New York: Wiley, 1963], pp. 77–80).
eventual reform, attested to by many empirical studies, thus cannot be explained by changes in the conditions that initially forced him into delinquency.

Delinquency is not confined to the lower classes. In order to get the pressure he needs, the strain theorist usually creates a perfect relation between social class and delinquency. This relation is "created": the strain theorist is interested in explaining only lower-class delinquency. Since there is no lower-class delinquency in the middle classes, the strain theorist may ask: What is it about the lower-class situation that produces delinquency? If he ever feels called upon to explain middle-class delinquency, the strain theorist has two options: he can argue that apparently middle-class boys committing delinquent acts are "really" lower-class boys; or he can reverse his original procedure and ask:

Much of this literature is summarized and critically evaluated in Barbara Woodrow, Social Science and Social Pathology (New York: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 157-172. Actually, one may derive contradictory statements from research on "reform." The statement in the text (most delinquent boys eventually become law-abiding adults) is true, but so, too, is the statement that most delinquent boys will be arrested for crimes as adults. The reconciliation of these statements is simple: the first relies upon a broader definition of delinquency than does the latter. To be meaningful, then, such statements must specify fairly carefully the degree of delinquency entailed. Follow-up studies of boys appearing in juvenile court suggest that a majority will be arrested for crimes as adults (see Henry D. McKay, "Report on the Criminal Careers of Male Delinquents in Chicago," Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, Report of The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice [Washington: USGPO, 1967], pp. 107-113, and Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, Juvenile Delinquents Grown Up [New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1946]). Follow-up studies of boys picked up by the police would show that the vast majority will not be arrested for crimes as adults (see Matza, Delinquency and Drift, pp. 21-26, 90, 31).

Since strain theories attempt to explain the behavior of more or less serious offenders, the fact that the "great majority" of delinquent boys become law-abiding adults is not, strictly speaking, evidence against these theories. In the end, however, this criticism does not depend on a shift in the definition of delinquency. The fact is that strain theory has difficulty with a maturational reform regardless of the proportion actually reforming. The importance of maturational reform as a problem for most theories of delinquency is abundantly documented in Matza, Delinquency and Drift, pp. 22-26.

A perfect ecological correlation and/or a perfect individual relation as defined by such measures as Yule's Q. In short, low social class is a necessary but not sufficient condition for delinquency, as delinquency is defined.


Criticisms of Strain Theory

The strain theorist must provide motivation to delinquency sufficient to account for the neutralization of moral constraints. Once he builds motivation as powerful as this into his explanatory system, he usually has a plausible explanation of delinquency. "Intense frustration" would seem to provide sufficient motivational energy to account for "delinquency." In fact, given the seriousness of most delinquent acts, it provides a little too much pressure; and during the days, weeks, or months that the intensely frustrated boy is conforming to conventional expectations, its dormancy is hard to explain.

The fact that most delinquent boys eventually become law-abiding adults is also a source of embarrassment to the strain theorist. The conditions he builds into his model normally do not change during adolescence or, for that matter, at the attainment of adulthood. As the strain theorist himself contends, the lower-class boy's position in the economic structure is relatively fixed. His

10 Merton, Social Theory, p. 146.
what is it about the middle-class situation that produces (middle-class) delinquency?

Every theorist discusses the actual class distribution of delinquency and attempts to base his decision to restrict his explanation to the lower class on an evaluation of available evidence. Implicit in such an effort is a criterion for deciding whether the relation between social class and delinquency is sufficiently strong to justify a class theory of delinquency. What is this criterion? How strong a relation between social class and delinquency is required to justify a class theory of delinquency?

The mere raising of these questions emphasizes the shakiness of the factual and logical foundations upon which strain theory is erected, since it is common among strain theorists themselves to question the correlation between class and crime.\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, recent delinquency research has tended to support this skepticism and more and more to undermine any theory that takes social class as the starting point for an explanation of juvenile delinquency.\(^\text{20}\)

High aspirations are not conducive to delinquency. All strain theories generate pressure to delinquency from a discrepancy between aspirations and expectations. In order directly to test a strain theory, it is thus necessary to measure at least two independent variables simultaneously. (In Robert K. Merton’s original theory, aspirations were assumed to be uniformly high within American society, and a discrepancy could thus be inferred directly from the realistically low expectations of segments of the population. However, subsequent research has undercut the assumption that all Americans place high and equal value on success, as Merton defined it.)\(^\text{20}\) The need to measure two independent

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\(^{19}\) This literature is summarized and discussed in Chapter IV.

\(^{20}\) Herbert H. Hyman, “The Value Systems of Different Classes,” Class, Status and Power, ed. Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset (New York: The Free Press, 1953), pp. 426-442. Hyman shows that lower-class persons are less likely to have high aspirations. In a reply to Hyman, Merton argues (Social Theory, pp. 170-176) that the problem is one of absolute frequencies rather than proportions. Actually the problem is one of correlation: Are lower-class persons with high aspirations more likely to become criminal than lower-class persons with low aspirations?

variables at once has tended to shield strain theory from potentially falsifying evidence: for example, the finding that legitimate aspirations are negatively related to delinquency could be countered by the argument that the relation would become positive if expectations were held constant.\(^\text{21}\) At the same time, much indirect evidence that the desires upon which the strain theorist relies were at work has been provided by research which shows relations between delinquency and factors that presumably impede the realization of these desires, such as school failure. In fact, on the basis of this indirect evidence, strain theories appear to have substantial empirical support, and research articles in which one of them provides the interpretive framework appear regularly.\(^\text{22}\)

Nevertheless, there is some direct evidence that the relation between aspirations and delinquency does not reverse when expectations are held constant,\(^\text{23}\) that many delinquents are not deprived in an objective sense,\(^\text{24}\) and that many delinquents do not feel deprived in the ways suggested by strain theorists.\(^\text{26}\)

Therefore, I tentatively reject strain theory on the ground

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\(^{24}\) Palmore and Hammond rely on Cloward and Ohlin’s theory, and Elliott relies on Cohen’s.


\(^{26}\) In Stinchcombe’s study, the hypothesis that "whenever the goals of success are strongly internalized but inaccessible, expressive alienation results" is the subject of much analysis. I think it fair to say that this hypothesis explains very little of the "expressive alienation" in Stinchcombe’s sample, and that the links between concepts and indicators with respect to this hypothesis are tenuous. Stinchcombe acknowledges the shakiness of his hypothesis and remains faithful to it only because he feels no alternative hypothesis is available.

Spergel’s study is based on comparisons of three groups, each consisting of ten boys. Although his data often conform to minutely detailed hypotheses derived from strain theory, they are in effect ecological data since variation on delinquency within the groups is consistently ignored.


\(^{26}\) Albert J. Reiss, Jr., and A. Lewis Rhodes, “Status Deprivation and Delinquent Behavior,” The Sociological Quarterly, IV (1963), 135-149.
that it is inadequate and misleading. It suggests that delinquency is a relatively permanent attribute of the person and/or a regularly occurring event; it suggests that delinquency is largely restricted to a single social class; and it suggests that persons accepting legitimate goals are, as a result of this acceptance, more likely to commit delinquent acts. Much of the discussion and data which follow will bear on my position that these suggestions are inadequate and misleading.

**Control Theories**

If strain theories may be traced to answers to Hobbes's question, control theories may be traced to the question itself. Strain theories assume that the Hobbesian question has been answered, that the important question is, "Why do men not obey the rules of society?" Conformity is taken for granted; deviance is problematic. In control theories, the Hobbesian question has never been adequately answered. The question remains, "Why do men obey the rules of society?" Deviance is taken for granted; conformity must be explained. 28

In strain theory, man is a moral animal. His morality accounts for the pressure that is built into the model. If morality is removed, however, if man is seen as an amoral animal, then tremendous pressure is unnecessary in accounting for his deviance. It is just such a removal of the moral roadblock that explains the demphasis on motivation that is characteristic of control theory: "It is our position, therefore, that in general behavior prescribed as delinquent or criminal need not be explained in any positive sense, since it usually results in quicker and easier achievement of goals than the normative behavior." 27

It is oversimplification to say, however, that strain theory assumes a moral man while control theory assumes an amoral man. Control theory merely assumes variation in morality: for some men, considerations of morality are important; for others, they are not. 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. This emphasis on calculation is reflected in a recent proposal by theorists operating from within this perspective: "The idea of paying boys to conform is sufficiently intriguing to merit study and experimentation." 28

The criticisms of control theory stemming from these and related assumptions are discussed in the following chapter, where a control theory of delinquency is presented in greater detail.

**Theories of Cultural Deviance**

A third set of theories assumes that men are incapable of committing "deviant" acts. A person may indeed commit acts deviant by the standards of, say, middle-class society, but he cannot commit acts deviant by his own standards. In other words, theorists from this school see deviant behavior as conformity to a set of standards not accepted by a larger (that is, more powerful) society. "If the community standards are positive but not according to accepted codes of conventional society, behavior will accordingly be contrary to standards of the larger society." 29

Obviously, if "deviant behavior" is simply behavior frowned upon by outsiders and not by insiders, it is unnecessary to posit any special motivational force or strain to account for it. A person simply learns to become a "criminal" in much the same way he

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27 Nye, Family Relationships, p. 5.
learns to play a violin or develops a taste for peanut butter. "A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law."  

The cultural deviance theorist rejects a fundamental assumption of strain theory. But, since he has no language with which to express his rejection, the cultural deviance theorist attacks this assumption indirectly. Edwin H. Sutherland has written: "The attempts by many scholars to explain criminal behavior by general drives and values, such as . . . striving for social status, [and] the money motive . . . , have been and must continue to be futile since they explain lawful behavior as completely as they explain criminal behavior." The strain theorist would grant that values common to all men cannot directly explain the criminal actions of some of them. These common values take on significance within his theory because he assumes that all men are not equally capable of realizing them. They are irrelevant to the cultural deviance theorist because he has no way of describing failure to attain them. In his world, failure and frustration have no place.  

The control theory assumption that crime is an amoral act is dismissed by the cultural deviance theorist as middle-class nonsense. In fact, since "criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons," principally "within intimate personal groups," the idea implicit in control theory that the criminal is cut off from his fellows is explicitly repudiated. Indeed, the cultural deviance theorist often suggests that the delinquent is unusually "sociable" and "gregarious."  

Criticisms of Cultural Deviance Theory  
Cultural deviance theory has been heavily criticized, yet it remains one of the most widely used perspectives in research and theory on crime and delinquency. The impact of this criticism is suggested by a recent statement of one of the proponents of the theory: "By comparison with its principal competitors . . . , differential association stands fairly secure." What is the basis of this security?  
Perhaps the outstanding event in the intellectual history of theories of cultural deviance was not a decision about the nature of man, but a rather ordinary-appearing decision about the nature of scientific explanation: "I reached the general conclusion that a concrete condition cannot be a cause of crime, and that the only way to get a causal explanation of criminal behavior is by abstracting from the varying concrete conditions things which are universally associated with crime." Sutherland decided that every case

31 Sutherland and Cressey, Principles of Criminology, p. 81.  
32 For what to my mind is a truly devastating critique of theories of cultural deviance, see Kornhauser, "Theoretical Issues," Part III. As Kornhauser notes, theories of cultural deviance do not distinguish between culture and social structure. They are thus incapable of making statements about discrepancies between what men desire and what they have, if, in fact, these theories recognize the possibility of such discrepancies. If strain theories assume a moral man, and control theories an amoral man, cultural deviance theories assume a hyperrational man. In a world where sin is impossible, the upright man hardly deserves congratulations, however.  
33 Sutherland and Cressey, Principles of Criminology, p. 81.  
34 Ibid., p. 82. See also Cohen, Delinquent Boys, pp. 105-107. In the end, of course, the criminal ends up just a little more moral than the law-abiding citizen because his actions are based on considerations of social solidarity rather than personal achievement.
of crime should be explained by the theory he proposed to construct; he thus appears to have relied upon the well-known method of analytic induction.  

Analytic induction proceeds by reformulating the hypothesis and/or redefining the phenomenon to be explained each time a deviant case is encountered. The ability to redefine the phenomenon may trick the user of analytic induction into merely defining that which he was to have explained. Yet, to my knowledge, Sutherland never felt called upon to redefine crime. Crime began and remained simply “violation of the law.” Instead, he reformulated his hypotheses until they were compatible with all known facts about crime. Hypotheses encompassing the cannibalism of the Donner Party, the murder of one newspaper editor by another, and a slum boy stealing a bike, are of necessarily highly abstract. Given the inferential distance between the concepts of such hypotheses and concrete events, it is not surprising that the theory of

48 Sutherland acknowledges the influence of Lindesmith, one of the first users of analytic induction (The Sutherland Papers, pp. 17–18). The paper most frequently cited by users of this method is by Ralph H. Turner, “The Quest for Universals in Sociological Research,” American Sociological Review, XVIII (1953), 604–611. Although users of analytic induction have been invariably contemptuous of quantitative—that is, probabilistic—research, Turner does not see the two as incompatible or antithetical. He argues, in fact, that by themselves theories derived from analytic induction are inadequate.

49 Thus Becker summarizes the results of his study of marijuana use with a series of tautologies, undoubtedly produced by his emendation of “marijuana use” to “marijuana use for pleasure.” He says, for example: “A person, then, cannot begin to use marijuana for pleasure, or continue its use for pleasure, unless he learns to define its effects as enjoyable, unless it becomes and remains an object he conceives as capable of producing pleasure.” Becker says at the beginning of his paper that the qualifier “for pleasure” was added to emphasize that the use of marijuana does not produce addiction, that it is “noncompulsive and casual,” and to eliminate those few cases in which marijuana is used for its prestige value only.” Becker thus suggests that neither the hypothesis nor the definition was altered by research. Such an hypothesis, it should be pointed out, could not conceivably be altered by research, whether or not the substance involved was addictive. Becker’s “research finding” is true. There is no way to dispute such a statement on empirical grounds. Is the statement also useful? Does it allow us to predict that jazz musicians or truck drivers would be more likely to use marijuana? Does it help us make sense of what we observe in the world? Suppose it were found that jazz musicians are more likely than truck drivers to use marijuana for pleasure. Would it help in understanding this difference to know that those who use marijuana for pleasure enjoy it? See Outsiders, pp. 41–58.

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differential association is virtually nonsensical. (It is also not surprising that empirical predictions derived from the theory tend to be trivial.)

Once the meanings of the concepts in Sutherland’s theory are to some extent specified, the issue immediately shifts from one of falsifiability to one of truth or falsity. For example, if the “definitions favorable to violation of law” upon which the theory rests are taken to be definitions that free the actor to commit delinquent acts, the theory is nonsensical (and the distinction between Sutherland’s theory and social control theory is easily lost). On the other hand, if the definitions favorable to violation of law are taken to be definitions that require delinquent behavior, the theory is again nonsensical (and, according to many critics and researchers, false).

48 Because of the generality and complexity of cultural deviance theories, I hesitate to assert either that they are inconsistent with control theory or that they are in general false. It is clear, however, that predictions derived from control theory will differ markedly from those deriving from particular cultural deviance theories. I shall therefore examine these cases in some detail and return to a general comparison of control and cultural deviance theory only after the analysis is essentially complete.

49 Glaser shows that one can derive from the theory of differential association such predictions as: residence in a high delinquency area will be associated with arrest rates (Human Behavior, ed. Rose, pp. 434–435).


44 My timidity with respect to the evidence against cultural deviance theories results from the following consideration: the survey studies showing little or no difference from one group to another with respect to crime-related values also show variation within the groups. Certainly the first fact requires modification, perhaps fatal modification, of cultural deviance theories. At the same time, it is difficult to conceive of the values measured being unrelated to crime at the individual level. If they are related, the arguments against cultural deviance theory are not as compelling as its critics take them to be. And criminological research has for too long based its theories on ecological data.
Chapter II

A Control Theory of Delinquency

"The more weakened the groups to which [the individual] belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognizes no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his private interests." 1

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

I begin with a classification and description of the elements of the bond to conventional society. I try to show how each of these elements is related to delinquent behavior and how they are related to each other. I then turn to the question of specifying the unit to which the person is presumably more or less tied, and to the question of the adequacy of the motivational force built into the explanation of delinquent behavior.

Elements of the Bond

Attachment

In explaining conforming behavior, sociologists justly emphasize sensitivity to the opinion of others. 2 Unfortunately, as sug-


2 Books have been written on the increasing importance of interpersonal sensitivity in modern life. According to this view, controls from within have become less important than controls from without in producing conformity. Whether or not this observation is true as a description of historical trends, it is true that interpersonal sensitivity has become more important in exp lain-
that to lack attachment to others is to be free from moral restraints is to use lack of attachment to explain the guiltlessness of the psychopath, the fact that he apparently has no conscience or super ego. In this view, lack of attachment to others is not merely a symptom of psychopathy, it is psychopathy; lack of conscience is just another way of saying the same thing; and the violation of norms is (or may be) a consequence.

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

Durkheim said it many years ago: "We are moral beings to the extent that we are social beings." This may be interpreted to mean that we are moral beings to the extent that we have "internalized the norms" of society. But what does it mean to say that a person has internalized the norms of society? The norms of society are by definition shared by the members of society. To violate a norm is, therefore, to act contrary to the wishes and expectations of other people. If a person does not care about the wishes and expectations of other people—that is, if he is insensitive to the opinion of others—then he is to that extent not bound by the norms. He is free to deviate.

The essence of internalization of norms, conscience, or super ego thus lies in the attachment of the individual to others. This

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7 "The logical untenability of the position that there are forces in man 'resistant to socialization' was ably demonstrated by Parsons over 30 years ago, and it is widely recognized that the position is empirically unsound because it assumes [i] some universal biological drive system distinctively separate from socialization and social context—a basic and intrinsically human nature" (Judith Blake and Kingsley Davis, "Norms, Values, and Sanctions," Handbook of Modern Sociology, ed. Robert E. L. Faris [Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964], p. 471).


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

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

"Of all passions, that which inclineth men least to break the laws, is fear. Nay, excepting some generous natures, it is the only thing, when there is the appearance of profit or pleasure by breaking the laws, that makes men keep them." 13 Few would deny that men on occasion obey the rules simply from fear of the consequences. This rational component in conformity we label commitment. What does it mean to say that a person is committed to conformity? In Howard S. Becker's formulation it means the following:

First, the individual is in a position in which his decision with regard to some particular line of action has consequences for other interests and activities not necessarily [directly] related to it. Second, he has placed himself in that position by his own prior actions. A third element is present though so obvious as not to be apparent: the committed person must be aware [of these other interests] and must recognize that his decision in this case will have ramifications beyond it.14

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

If attachment to others is the sociological counterpart of the superego or conscience, commitment is the counterpart of the ego or common sense. To the person committed to conventional lines of action, risking one to ten years in prison for a ten-dollar holdup is stupidity, because to the committed person the costs and risks obviously exceed ten dollars in value. (To the psychoanalyst, such an act exhibits failure to be governed by the "reality-principle.") In the sociological control theory, it can be and is generally assumed that the decision to commit a criminal act may well be rationally determined—that the actor's decision was not irrational bond to conventional society. So used, the concept is somewhat broader than is true for either Toby or Bins and Pillavin, where the concept is roughly equivalent to what is here called "commitment."


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

The concept of commitment assumes that the organization of society is such that the interests of most persons would be endangered if they were to engage in criminal acts. Most people, simply by the process of living in an organized society, acquire goods, reputations, prospects that they do not want to risk losing. These accumulations are society's insurance that they will abide by the rules. Many hypotheses about the antecedents of delinquent behavior are based on this premise. For example, Arthur L. Stinchcombe's hypothesis that "high school rebellion ... occurs when future status is not clearly related to present performance" 15 suggests that one is committed to conformity not only by what one has but also by what one hopes to obtain. Thus "ambition" and/or "aspiration" play an important role in producing conformity. The person becomes committed to a conventional line of action, and he is therefore committed to conformity.

Most lines of action in a society are of course conventional. The clearest examples are educational and occupational careers. Actions thought to jeopardize one's chances in these areas are presumably avoided. Interestingly enough, even nonconventional commitments may operate to produce conventional conformity. We are told, at least, that boys aspiring to careers in the racket or professional thievery are judged by their "honesty" and "reliability"—traits traditionally in demand among seekers of office boys.16

Involvement

Many persons undoubtedly owe a life of virtue to a lack of opportunity to do otherwise. Time and energy are inherently limited: "Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat

and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a bon vivant, and a lady killer, as well as a philosopher, a philanthropist, a statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a 'tone-poet' and saint. But the thing is simply impossible.'"  

The things that William James here says he would like to be or do are all, I suppose, within the realm of conventionality, but if he were to include illicit actions he would still have to eliminate some of them as simply impossible.

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

This line of reasoning is responsible for the stress placed on recreational facilities in many programs to reduce delinquency, for much of the concern with the high school dropout, and for the idea that boys should be drafted into the Army to keep them out of trouble. So obvious and persuasive is the idea that involvement in conventional activities is a major deterrent to delinquency that it was accepted even by Sutherland: "In the general area of juvenile delinquency it is probable that the most significant difference between juveniles who engage in delinquency and those who do not is that the latter are provided abundant opportunities of a conventional type for satisfying their recreational interests, while the former lack those opportunities or facilities."

The view that "idle hands are the devil's workshop" has received more sophisticated treatment in recent sociological writings on delinquency. David Matza and Gresham M. Sykes, for example, suggest that delinquents have the values of a leisure class, the same values ascribed by Veblen to the leisure class: a search for kicks, disdain of work, a desire for the big score, and acceptance of aggressive toughness as proof of masculinity. Matza and Sykes explain delinquency by reference to this system of values, but they note that adolescents at all class levels are "to some extent" members of a leisure class, that they "move in a limbo between earlier parental domination and future integration with the social structure through the bonds of work and marriage." In the end, then, the leisure of the adolescent produces a set of values, which, in turn, leads to delinquency.

Belief

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

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

18 Few activities appear to be so engrossing that they rule out contemplation of alternative lines of behavior, at least if estimates of the amount of time men spend plotting sexual deviations have any validity.
21 Ibid., p. 716.
22 The starving man stealing the loaf of bread is the image evoked by most strain theories. In this image, the starving man's belief in the wrongness of his act is clearly not something that must be explained away. It can be assumed to be present without causing embarrassment to the explanation.
nondeviant believe the deviant act is wrong, how do we account for the fact that one commits it and the other does not?

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

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

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

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

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27 In asserting that Cressey's assumption is invalid with respect to delinquency, I do not wish to suggest that it is invalid for the question of embezzlement, where the problem faced by the deviator is fairly specific and he can reasonably be assumed to be an upstanding citizen. (Although even here the fact that the embezzler's nonshareable financial problem often results from some sort of lanky-panky suggests that "verbalizations" may be less necessary than might otherwise be assumed.)
not assume, as does Matza, that "delinquents concur in the conventional assessment of delinquency." We assume, in contrast, that there is variation in the extent to which people believe they should obey the rules of society, and, furthermore, that the less a person believes he should obey the rules, the more likely he is to violate them.

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

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

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

Relations Among the Elements

In general, the more closely a person is tied to conventional society in any of these ways, the more closely he is likely to be tied in the other ways. The person who is attached to conventional people is, for example, more likely to be involved in conventional activities and to accept conventional notions of desirable conduct. Of the six possible combinations of elements, three seem particularly important and will therefore be discussed in some detail.

Attachment and Commitment

It is frequently suggested that attachment and commitment (as the terms are used here) tend to vary inversely. Thus, according to delinquency research, one of the lower-class adolescent’s “problems” is that he is unable to sever ties to parents and peers, ties that prevent him from devoting sufficient time and energy to educational and occupational aspirations. His attachments are thus seen as getting in the way of conventional commitments. According to stratification research, the lower-class boy who breaks free from these attachments is more likely to be upwardly mobile. Both research traditions thus suggest that those bound to conformity for instrumental reasons are less likely to be bound to conformity by emotional ties to conventional others. If the unattached compensate for lack of attachment by commitment to achievement, and if the uncommitted make up for their lack of commitment by becoming more attached to persons, we could conclude that neither attachment nor commitment will be related to delinquency.

The idea that the middle-class boy is less closely tied than the lower-class boy to his peers has been widely adopted in the literature on delinquency. The middle-class boy’s "cold and rational" relations with his peers are in sharp contrast with the "spontaneous and warm" relations of the lower-class boy. See, for example, Albert K. Cohen, Delinquent Boys (New York: The Free Press, 1955), pp. 102-109.

The evidence in favor of this proposition is summarized in Seymour M. Lipset and Reinhard Benirsch, Social Mobility in Industrial Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), especially pp. 249-259. For example, "These [business leaders] show strong traits of independence, they are characterized by an inability to form intimate relations and are consequently often socially isolated men" (p. 251).
Actually, despite the evidence apparently to the contrary, I think it safe to assume that attachment to conventional others and commitment to achievement tend to vary together. The common finding that middle-class boys are likely to choose instrumental values over those of family and friendship while the reverse is true of lower-class boys cannot, I think, be properly interpreted as meaning that middle-class boys are less attached than lower-class boys to their parents and peers. The zero-sum methodological model that produces such findings is highly likely to be misleading. Also, although many of the characteristics of the upwardly mobile alluded to by Seymour M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix could be accounted for as consequences rather than causes of mobility, a methodological critique of these studies is not necessary to conclude that we may expect to find a positive relation between attachment and commitment in the data to be presented here. The present study and the one study Lipset and Bendix cite as disagreeing with their general conclusion that the upwardly mobile come from homes in which interpersonal relations were unsatisfactory are both based on high school samples. As Lipset and Bendix note, such studies necessarily focus on aspirations rather than actual mobility. For the present, it seems, we must choose between studies based on hopes for the occupational future and those based on construction or reconstruction of the familial past. Interestingly enough, the former are at least as likely to be valid as the latter.

Commitment and Involvement

Delinquent acts are events. They occur at specific points in space and time. For a delinquent act to occur, it is necessary, as is true of all events, for a series of causal chains to converge at a given moment in time. Events are difficult to predict, and specification of some of the conditions necessary for them to occur often leaves a large residue of indeterminacy. For example, to say that a boy is free of bonds to conventional society is not to say that he will necessarily commit delinquent acts; he may and he may not. All we can say with certainty is that he is more likely to commit delinquent acts than the boy strongly tied to conventional society.

It is tempting to make a virtue of this defect and espouse "probabilistic theory," since it, and it alone, is consistent with "the facts." Nevertheless, this temptation should be resisted. The primary virtue of control theory is not that it relies on conditions that make delinquency possible while other theories rely on conditions that make delinquency necessary. On the contrary, with respect to their logical framework, these theories are superior to control theory, and, if they were as adequate empirically as control theory, we should not hesitate to advocate their adoption in preference to control theory.

But they are not as adequate, and we must therefore seek to reduce the indeterminacy within control theory. One area of possible development is with respect to the link between elements of the bond affecting the probability that one will yield to temptation and those affecting the probability that one will be exposed to temptation.

The most obvious link in this connection is between educational and occupational aspirations (commitment) and involvement in conventional activities. We can attempt to show how commitment limits one's opportunities to commit delinquent acts and thus get away from the assumption implicit in many control theories that such opportunities are simply randomly distributed through the population in question.

Attachment and Belief

That there is a more or less straightforward connection between attachment to others and belief in the moral validity of rules appears evident. The link we accept here and which we shall attempt to document is described by Jean Piaget:

It is not the obligatory character of the rule laid down by an individual that makes us respect this individual, it is the respect we feel for the individual that makes us regard as obligatory the rule he lays down. The appearance of the sense of duty in a child thus admits of the simplest explanation, namely that he receives commands from older children (in play) and from

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88 Relations between measures of attachment and commitment are examined in Chapter VIII.
84 Social Mobility, p. 253.
adults (in life), and that he respects older children and parents.88

In short, “respect is the source of law.”87 Insofar as the child respects (loves and fears) his parents, and adults in general, he will accept their rules. Conversely, insofar as this respect is undermined, the rules will tend to lose their obligatory character. It is assumed that belief in the obligatory character of rules will to some extent maintain its efficacy in producing conformity even if the respect which brought it into being no longer exists. It is also assumed that attachment may produce conformity even in the face of beliefs favorable to nonconformity. In short, these two sources of moral behavior, although highly and complexly related, are assumed to have an independent effect that justifies their separation.

**The Bond to What?**

Control theorists sometimes suggest that attachment to any object outside one’s self, whether it be the home town, the starry heavens, or the family dog, promotes moral behavior.88 Although it seems obvious that some objects are more important than others and that the important objects must be identified if the elements of the bond are to produce the consequences suggested by the theory, a priori rankings of the objects of attachment have proved peculiarly unsatisfactory. Durkheim, for example, concludes that the three groups to whom attachment is most important in producing morality are the family, the nation, and humanity. He further concludes that, of these, the nation is most important.88 All of which, given much contemporary thinking on the virtues of patriotism,40 illustrates rather well the difficulty posed by such questions as: Which is more important in the control of delinquency, the father or the mother, the family or the school?

87 Ibid., p. 370.
89 Ibid., pp. 73–79.

40 In the end, Durkheim distinguishes between a patriotism that leads to concern for domestic problems and one that emphasizes foreign relations (especially that variety which puts “national sentiment in conflict with commitments of mankind”).

Although delinquency theory in general has taken a stand on many questions about the relative importance of institutions (for example, that the school is more important than the family), control theory has remained decidedly eclectic, partly because each element of the bond directs attention to different institutions. For these reasons, I shall treat specification of the units of attachment as a problem in the empirical interpretation of control theory, and not attempt at this point to say which should be more or less important.

**Where Is the Motivation?**

The most disconcerting question the control theorist faces goes something like this: “Yes, but why do they do it?” In the good old days, the control theorist could simply strip away the “veen of civilization” and expose man’s “animal impulses” for all to see. These impulses appeared to him (and apparently to his audience) to provide a plausible account of the motivation to crime and delinquency. His argument was not that delinquents and criminals alone are animals, but that we are all animals, and thus all naturally capable of committing criminal acts. It took no great study to reveal that children, chickens, and dogs occasionally assault and steal from their fellow creatures; that children, chickens, and dogs also behave for relatively long periods in a perfectly moral manner. Of course the acts of chickens and dogs are not “assault” or “theft,” and such behavior is not “moral”; it is simply the behavior of a chicken or a dog. The chicken stealing corn from his neighbor knows nothing of the moral law; he does not want to violate rules; he wants merely to eat corn. The dog maliciously destroying a pillow or feloniously assaulting another dog is the moral equal of the chicken. No motivation to deviance is required to explain his acts. So, too, no special motivation to crime within the human animal was required to explain his criminal acts.

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

... it is important to point out one important limitation of both types of theory. They [culture conflict and social disorganization theories] are both control theories in the sense that they explain delinquency in terms of the absence of effective controls. They appear, therefore, to imply a model of motivation that assumes that the impulse to delinquency is an inherent characteristic of young people and does not itself need to be explained; it is something that erupts when the lid—i.e., internalized cultural restraints or external authority—is off. 41

There are several possible and I think reasonable reactions to this criticism. One reaction is simply to acknowledge the assumption, to grant that one is assuming what control theorists have always assumed about the motivation to crime—that it is constant across persons (at least within the system in question): "There is no reason to assume that only those who finally commit a deviant act usually have the impulse to do so. It is much more likely that most people experience deviant impulses frequently. At least in fantasy, people are much more deviant than they appear." 42 There is certainly nothing wrong with making such an assumption. We are free to assume anything we wish to assume; the truth of our theory is presumably subject to empirical test. 43

A second reaction, involving perhaps something of a quibble, is to defend the logic of control theory and to deny the alleged assumption. We can say the fact that control theory suggests the absence of something causes delinquency is not a proper criticism, since negative relations have as much claim to scientific acceptability as do positive relations. 44 We can also say that the present
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theory does not impute an inherent impulse to delinquency to anyone. 45 That, on the contrary, it denies the necessity of such an imputation: "The desires, and other passions of man, are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions, that proceed from those passions, till they know a law that forbids them." 46

A third reaction is to accept the criticism as valid, to grant that a complete explanation of delinquency would provide the necessary impetus, and proceed to construct an explanation of motivation consistent with control theory. Briar and Pillai provide situational motivation: "We assume these acts are prompted by short-term situationally induced desires experienced by all boys to obtain valued goods, to portray courage in the presence of, or be loyal to peers, to strike out at someone who is disliked, or simply to 'get kicks.'" 47 Matza, too, agrees that delinquency cannot be explained simply by removal of controls:

Delinquency is only epiphenomenally action. . . [It] is essentially infraction. It is rule-breaking behavior performed by juveniles aware that they are violating the law and of the nature of their deed, and made permissible by the neutralization of infracions ['l'] elements. Thus, Cohen and Short are fundamentally right when they insist that social control theory is incom-

While the origins of this view are unknown to me, the fact that such a statement appears to have some claim to plausibility suggests one of the sources of uneasiness in the face of a control theory.

The popular "it's-an-id-argument" dismissal of explanations of deviant behavior assumes that the founding fathers of sociology somehow proved that the blood of man is neither warm nor red, but spiritual. The intellectual trap springs shut on the countassumption that innate aggressive-destructive impulses course through the veins, as it should. The solution is not to accept both views, but to accept neither.

44 I have frequently heard the statement "it's an absence of something explanation" used as an apparently damning criticism of a sociological theory.
45 Briar and Pillai, "Situational Inducements," p. 36.
Chapter III

The Sample and the Data

Western Contra Costa County is part of the San Francisco-Oakland metropolitan area, bounded on the south by Berkeley and on the west and north by San Francisco and San Pablo bays. In the hills to the east live professionals and executives who commute to Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, and the major city in the western part of the county, Richmond. The flatland between the hills and the bay is populated predominantly by manual workers and, since the beginning of World War II, by a Negro population that has grown from less than 1 to more than 12 percent.¹

The Sample

The sample on which the present study is based was drawn as part of the Richmond Youth Project from the 17,500 students entering the eleven public junior and senior high schools of this area in the fall of 1964.² This population was stratified by race, sex, school, and grade, producing 130 subgroups, such as seventh-grade non-Negro boys at Granada Junior High School and tenth-grade Negro girls at Richmond High School. In most cases, 85 percent of the Negro boys, 65 percent of the Negro girls, 30 percent of the non-Negro (largely Caucasian but with some Oriental and Mexican-American) boys, and 12 percent of the non-Negro girls were selected randomly for inclusion in the sample.³ In a few

³ Throughout this chapter, I refer to “non-Negro” students and to girls. In the analysis which follows, “non-Negro” becomes “white,” and the girls disappear. Subsequent reference to “white” boys is accurate, because the few Oriental and Mexican-American boys were removed from the non-Negro category. Since girls have been neglected for too long by students of delin-