

KEY IDEA: HIRSCHI'S SOCIAL BOND/SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY



KEY WORK

Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Travis Hirschi's social bond/social control theory has remained a major paradigm in criminology since its introduction in 1969. To be sure, few theories have generated as much empirical attention, or have sparked as much debate within the field, as Hirschi's theory. It has been tested by scholars extensively (Akers & Sellers, 2008) and has been the source of heated disagreements among scholars on both theoretical and empirical grounds (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2007). Hirschi himself has remained a leading figure in the discipline for over four decades now and continues to be among the most cited criminologists year after year (Wright, 2002). Indeed, few scholars can claim to have been this relevant to the field for this long. This was no accident—there's a reason why his ideas have “caught on” where other ideas (even those that seem to be eerily similar) have been ignored, and such is the focus of this chapter.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE 1960s

The 1960s were an interesting time in American history for a variety of reasons. This was the decade of clashing values that brought us acid rock; police dogs and fire hoses set upon civil rights demonstrators in the South; Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; phrases like "free love" pitted against laws prohibiting the use of contraception; the burning of draft cards and the fleeing of draft dodgers to Canada; skateboards; miniskirts; the Black Panthers; the assassinations of John and Bobby Kennedy and of Martin Luther King, the presence of non-white athletes Roberto Clemente, Willie Mays, and Hank Aaron in major league baseball; the burning of bras by feminists, and the riots at the Democratic National Convention. It was also the decade that ushered in a number of new ways of thinking about crime and crime control, from the labeling perspective and its influence on juvenile justice system reforms (Lemert, 1967), to the early roots of Akers' social learning theory (Burgess & Akers, 1966), to the resurgence of the rational choice perspective (Becker, 1968) and the outright rejection of previous ways of thinking about crime such as social disorganization theory (Lilly et al., 2007). The late 1960s also contained two important demographic developments that occurred in concert and that became central to the introduction of Hirschi's social bond/social control theory.

First, there was a large maturing population of those who we would consider the World War II generation, starting to move into their 30s, 40s, and 50s—a time in life when, statistically speaking, people's political leanings tend to start creeping to the right, becoming more and more conservative (Franz, Freedman, Goldstein, & Ridout, 2007). At the same time, a second demographic shift was occurring: A youthful population, known as the "baby boomers" (people born shortly after the close of WWII), was entering late teens and early adulthood—a time in life when people's trajectories of antisocial behavior are at their peak (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986) and their political leanings tend to be more liberal (Franz et al., 2007). Thus, at this time there was a generational imbalance in the United States that the country had never really experienced before, one that found two large groups of citizens at odds with one another—one struggling to gain independence and the other trying to reestablish the 1950s level of social order that they felt had been lost (Pratt, Maahs, & Stehr, 1998).

In addition, as the nation was riding a wave of post-Kennedy era political liberalism, the backlash against that movement gained steam. On one side we had the "summer of love" and Woodstock, which gave us the tradition-breaking music of The Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, and Joan Baez, among others. It also saw the onset of a number of important legal developments such as the exclusionary rule, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965

Voting Rights Act, the 1968 Fair Housing Act, the expansion of inmates' rights, and the creation of a host of legal protections for juveniles.

On the other side, we had growing skepticism over the ability of the state to control crime benevolently through treatment, exemplified in films like *A Clockwork Orange*; a groundswell of anger over racial integration in the South; and a Nixon administration that was the first to formally adopt a "law and order" campaign strategy to combat crime (Baum, 1996) that served as the underpinning for the modern-day "get tough" movement (Pratt, 2009). This struggle between different ways of looking at the world was exacerbated by rising crime rates in the late 1960s—a problem that was blamed, at least in part, on what was perceived as an overly lenient criminal justice system (Cullen & Gilbert, 1982). As a result, society started to discuss seriously the potential problems of a culture of permissiveness (Currie, 1998).

This was the social and political climate that Travis Hirschi was operating within when he developed his theory. Hirschi grew up in rural Utah and attended the University of Utah, receiving an undergraduate degree in sociology in the early 1960s. Not known for being a progressive state either socially or politically, it was rather a culture shock for Hirschi when he moved to San Francisco to pursue graduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley, right in the middle of the psychedelic movement's epicenters off Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue and San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury (see Laub, 2002). It is not surprising that a kid who grew up in rural Utah in the 1950s would find 1960s San Francisco to be "out of control."

SOCIAL BOND/SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY

According to Hirschi (1969), virtually all existing criminological theories began with a faulty fundamental premise: that criminal behavior requires, in some form, the creation of criminal motivation. For example, strain theories that emerged out of Merton's (1938) work assumed that it was the pressure placed on social norms, due to a disconnect between youths' goals and aspirations and their ability to reach such goals through legitimate means, that created the motivation to offend—an assumption echoed by later versions of strain theory articulated by Cloward and Ohlin (1960). In addition, perspectives drawing on the differential association tradition (see Sutherland, 1939) assumed that the values and techniques associated with criminal behavior had to be learned—a process that occurred largely through exposure to deviant peers and to deviant value systems that created the motivation to offend (Akers & Sellers, 2008).

Hirschi, on the other hand, began with the opposite premise: that all of us, beginning at birth, possess the hedonistic drive to act in the kinds of selfish and aggressive ways that lead to criminal behavior. Indeed, it takes

no disjunction between a child's long-term goals and his perception of blocked opportunities to meet those goals to steal another child's truck in a sandbox, nor does it take extended exposure to deviant peers or to deviant value systems for a child to impulsively and aggressively shove that child to the ground after swiping said sandbox truck without thinking about the long-term consequences of his actions. These behaviors, Hirschi contended, are part of our innate human nature—the important part, he argued, is that most of us control these “natural” urges. In short, Hirschi (1969) began his theory with the view that asking why offenders “do it” when it comes to crime and delinquency is, on its face, an irrelevant question. Instead, we should be asking, “why *don't* we do it?”

For Hirschi, the answer could be found in the bonds that people form to prosocial values, prosocial people, and prosocial institutions. It is these bonds, Hirschi held, that end up controlling our behavior when we are tempted to engage in criminal or deviant acts. Accordingly, these bonds come in four interrelated forms, the first of which is attachment. *Attachment*, according to Hirschi (1969), refers to the level of psychological affection one has for prosocial others and institutions. For Hirschi, parents and schools were of critical importance in this regard, where youths who form close attachments to their parents¹ and schools will, by extension, experience greater levels of social control. For example, in the movie *Scream* (Craven, 1996), when the two killers are unmasked, one of them laments that, once everyone finds out about them, “my mom is gonna be so mad at me.” Although this particular fictional offender's maternal attachments obviously did not keep him from killing, it does point to the broader issue of how these attachments can control our behavior—of not wanting to disappoint those we love with our misbehavior.

The second type of bond is referred to as *commitment*, where Hirschi cited the importance of the social relationships that people value, which they would not want to risk jeopardizing by committing criminal or deviant acts. In essence, Hirschi noted that people are less likely to misbehave when they know that they have something to lose. For juveniles, this could mean not wanting to look bad in front of friends, parents, or teachers for having committed a crime—something for which shame from those whose opinion of them matters would be a likely consequence. The same would hold true for adults, Hirschi would argue, where people might refrain from engaging in deviant activities that may threaten their employment or marriage—bonds that, again, may serve as sources of social control.

The third type of social bond is known as *involvement*, which relates to the opportunity costs associated with how people spend their time. Specifically, Hirschi tapped into the old philosophy that “idle hands are the devil's workshop” in that if people are spending their time engaged in some form of prosocial activity, then they are not, by definition, spending their time engaged in antisocial activity. For example, youths who are

heavily involved in legitimate school-related activities—either academically, socially, or athletically—will not be spending that same time destroying property, stealing things that don't belong to them, shooting heroin, and so on. This is not to say, of course, that such youths cannot engage in those behaviors *before or after* their legitimate activities. Nevertheless, Hirschi argued that, at least during that time, such youths will not be committing delinquent acts.

The final type of social bond identified by Hirschi is *belief*, which refers to the degree to which one adheres to the values associated with behaviors that conform to the law; the assumption being that the more important such values are to a person, the less likely he or she is to engage in criminal/deviant behavior. For example, youths who do not value the notion that it is a bad idea to skip school, and instead value spending the day playing the latest version of *Guitar Hero* (music video game) and smoking marijuana, are more likely to do just that. Conversely, youths who, for example, share the belief that using illegal narcotics is wrong are less likely to participate in such behavior. Although this relationship is quite simple, the underlying concept Hirschi was tapping into was that there is an important link between attitudes and behavior—not in the sense that attitudes motivate people to commit crime, but rather that prosocial attitudes constrain people from committing the crimes they otherwise would have in the absence of such social bonds (i.e., beliefs).

Perhaps the most significant element of Hirschi's theory is that, taken together, these social bonds coalesce in a way that controls our behavior indirectly—that is, we do not need to have these bonds directly present in our lives to keep our behavior in check. Instead, the prosocial bonds we have formed can control our behavior even when they are no longer there. To illustrate this point, ask yourself this question: Have you ever found yourself driving in the middle of nowhere and you encounter a four-way stop? You can see all around you and you know that nobody is coming, you don't need to yield to anyone, and there is no police officer camping out near the intersection to catch you if you were to just roll right through it. Yet what would many of us do? We would stop anyway (or come very close to it). Why do we do this? Our visual scan of the area says that it can't be because of the direct threat of getting a ticket or of getting into an accident. Hirschi would contend that it is instead the "indirect" psychological control exerted by our social bonds that causes us to stop at that intersection.

Relatedly, it is also important to note that Hirschi's social bonds represented, at least primarily, mechanisms of informal social control—that is, the bonds that control our behavior are typically social conventions rather than formally adopted laws. If you doubt the power of informal rules to guide what we decide to do or not do at any given moment, consider the example of elevator behavior. None of us has been given a pamphlet concerning how

we should or should not behave when getting on an elevator, yet there are consistencies of action that all of us seem to follow: A little small talk is permissible, but keep it superficial; give everyone else adequate personal space; looking up at the light moving from floor to floor is the most common place to direct your visual attention. If you doubt the power of any of these informal norms, try violating them sometime and see just how uncomfortable you make those riding with you. Indeed, start a conversation about religion or politics with your elevator mates, or stand facing them while invading their space, or get on your hands and knees and closely examine a spot on the floor. You'll see just how quickly the discomfort level will rise, and you will know that your behavior has violated the rules that informally keep our behavior in check.

Perhaps a more criminologically relevant example would be how many of us handle holiday family get-togethers. We are there with family, whether we like it or not, and at times the veneer of civility starts to wear thin. When the uncle you may have loathed for your entire life takes the best piece of turkey right before you get to it, what stops you from beating him about the head with the gravy ladle? Is it because there are laws telling you that doing so is illegal—is that what stops you? Unlikely. The more likely explanation is that you have a set of bonds in the form of morals and values that tell you that bludgeoning someone with a serving implement is not an appropriate response to turkey pilfering—that is what keeps your behavior in line. Thus, the formal legal rule prohibiting assault-by-ladle likely plays little to no role in your decision to simply move on to the mashed potatoes.

In essence, Hirschi (1969) argued that juvenile delinquents and adult criminals lack these bonds to conventional society. Offenders behave the way they do because they are not controlled; their “natural instincts” are not curtailed. In taking this position, Hirschi created one of the deepest divisions within criminology—one where the very premise of all “motivational” theories was called into question. The legacy of this division is still with us today and can be seen, for example, in how vehemently scholars from the “control” versus “learning” camps disagree with one another (see McGloin, Pratt, & Maahs, 2004). This is a debate that has stayed with us for decades and is likely to continue well into the future. What is often overlooked, however, is the extent to which this debate was fueled not necessarily by Hirschi's idea itself, but rather the way in which Hirschi *presented* his theory. That is the subject of the following section.

THE MARKETING OF SOCIAL BOND/SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY

As Hirschi was developing his theory, it is important to note that “control theories” had been around in criminology for quite some time already. Shaw and McKay's (1942) social disorganization theory and the early

perspectives of Reckless (1943) and Sykes and Matza (1957) all drew upon—at least to some degree—the notion of informal social control. What, then, made Hirschi's theory essentially unique and original even if the ideas underlying his theory weren't? We argue here that there were three properties of the way in which Hirschi's *Causes of Delinquency* was constructed—and therefore its ideas marketed—that aided considerably its impact on the field.

Reason #1: A New Approach to Theory Construction

Scholars have long held that, generally speaking, theory building in criminology has been a sloppy endeavor (see Gibbons, 1994). Rarely is a theory stated in one location (e.g., a book or a journal article) in its entirety, with clearly articulated, testable propositions. Instead, what we typically find is that theories are presented discursively over time, often involving multiple authors, over multiple publications, where elements are added, subtracted, and modified according to an ongoing dialogue with the field over the theory's relative strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, until Hirschi came along, theoretical critiques were generally made on theoretical grounds; that is, ideas were debated among scholars according to criteria such as logical consistency and the clarity of the theory's key propositions. It wasn't until Hirschi entered the picture that the relationship between newly gathered empirical data and new theory construction would really get solidified. Indeed, Hirschi's 1969 book wasn't merely a theoretical critique of existing criminological paradigms on theoretical grounds—he went and got data to prove it!

To do so, as Hirschi was in the planning stages of his doctoral dissertation, he explored the option of using the data gathered by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, the authors of *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (1950), who had a large longitudinal dataset containing 500 delinquent and 500 nondelinquent boys from Boston. His hopes were quashed, however, when Eleanor Glueck informed Hirschi's dissertation advisor, Charles Glock, that they were still using their data and weren't ready to share it with others yet (Laub, 2002). As Laub noted, "it is hard to imagine what criminology would have become in the latter part of the twentieth century if Hirschi had reanalyzed the Gluecks' data for his dissertation instead of writing *Causes [of Delinquency]!*" (p. xviii). In an odd twist of criminological history, along with Robert Sampson, John Laub himself would later use the Gluecks' data in the formulation of their life course theory of criminal behavior, which essentially affirmed the importance of Hirschi's original ideas (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

So with the Gluecks' data off the table, as an alternative Hirschi was able to work with Alan B. Wilson—the principal investigator of the Richmond (California) Youth Project in 1964. Although this was not

Hirschi's study, Wilson made a deal with Hirschi that, in exchange for his work on the project, Hirschi would be allowed to develop questions that could be inserted into the survey instrument that he could then use for his dissertation work (Laub, 2002). Armed with data, Hirschi was ready to take the next step!

Reason #2: Operationalizing Theories

Drawing heavily upon an unpublished paper authored by Ruth Kornhauser—a paper that would be developed more fully into the influential *Social Sources of Delinquency* (1978)—Hirschi organized the field of criminology into three perspectives: his social bond theory, the “cultural deviance” theory most attributable to Sutherland (1939), and “strain theory” as articulated by Merton (1938) and more recently by Cloward and Ohlin (1960). Given this opportunity to create his own survey items, Hirschi then developed a set of direct, operational measures of the key concepts specified by each of these three theories. These items included questions tapping into each of the four bonds discussed above for social bond theory (items and scales that are still used today) and attitudes about the violation of laws according to the cultural deviance perspective. Yet what was perhaps most interesting was the measure of strain that he developed—one that would be used by researchers for many years after.

In particular, Hirschi faced the task of attempting to measure with survey items the disjunction between the intensity of one's goals of economic success (the goal integral to the American Dream, according to Merton) and the structural barriers to reaching those goals imposed by class inequalities. The difficulty of the task was compounded by the fact that these would be youths answering the surveys, yet Hirschi pressed on. He developed an indicator of “goals,” which was youths' “educational aspirations,” and then attempted to capture the structural barriers produced by differential opportunities by asking these youths about their “education expectations,” the assumption being that such expectations tapped into what youths thought of as realistically possible (see Unnever, Cullen, Mathers, McClure, & Allison, 2009). He then created a new variable—the “aspiration-expectation gap”—that was his proxy for strain (the assumption being that those with larger gaps would be experiencing more strain).

This measure of strain that Hirschi constructed was important for two reasons. First, he found that, by and large, there really was no widespread aspiration-expectation gap among his respondents—in essence, the youths gave virtually the same responses to the aspirations and expectations questions on the survey. While it is possible that the youths participating in the survey didn't fully appreciate the linguistic difference between the two

terms, Hirschi instead treated this finding as evidence that most kids simply don't experience that much strain. Second, and perhaps more important, Hirschi found that youths who had higher educational aspirations tended to have lower rates of juvenile delinquency. Hirschi interpreted this finding to mean that such aspirations are an indicator of commitment to conventional behavior. Thus, his strain measure became, by default, a social bond measure as well. In any event, now that the variables had been operationalized—something that hadn't really been attempted in criminology before when it came to a theoretical critique—the next step taken by Hirschi was perhaps the most critical.

Reason #3: Theoretical “Fight Club”

Some scholars hold that scientific knowledge can (and should) grow through theoretical integration, that by combining potentially compatible elements from alternative perspectives, a “better” understanding of criminal behavior could be reached (Tittle, 2000). Hirschi did not buy into this line of thinking at all. In fact, Unnever et al. (2009) stated that,

For Hirschi, theories have incompatible core assumptions and should wage a contest to see which one, in the end, accounts more completely for the known empirical reality. As a result, in *Causes of Delinquency*, Hirschi was not seeking to uncover points of theoretical commonality but rather to show that the cultural deviance theory and strain theory were incorrect and should be relegated to the criminological dustbin. (p. 381)

If we were to make an analogy to a couple of recent films here, Hirschi's view of theory building was less like *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* and more like *Fight Club*. Or, put differently, his theory leaned closer to being combative than it did to being inclusive.

So in the spirit of theoretical competition (or perhaps a theoretical brawl), Hirschi proceeded to test the measures derived from each of these theories against one another under the assumption that there would be a winner and perhaps multiple losers. For Hirschi, that was exactly the case. What he found was that, simply put, measures of social bonds “matter” when it comes to predicting delinquent behavior in youths. More important, measures derived from cultural deviance and strain theories—if they mattered at all—were rendered insignificant once statistical controls for the social bond measures were introduced. The clear “winner” in this contest, therefore, was social bond theory, or, put differently, cultural deviance and strain theories could consider themselves winners if social bond theory wasn't playing.

This approach that Hirschi took was new, and it fundamentally changed the game in criminology by introducing the “comparative test” that has been a staple of criminological theory and research ever since. No longer would it be good enough to merely develop measures of one theory and provide a test of its propositions. What made Hirschi’s work so compelling was that he attempted to demonstrate empirically that not only was his theory “right,” but the leading contenders were also “wrong,” *within the same study*. This was no trivial matter, for it sealed Hirschi’s theory in the minds of criminologists and radically changed the nature of “business as usual” in criminology.

THE LEGACY OF SOCIAL BOND/SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY

The impact of Hirschi’s *Causes of Delinquency* is difficult to overstate. Accordingly, there are at least five tangible ways Hirschi’s work has influenced the field of criminology. First, and as stated above, the “comparative test” between competing criminological ideas, using empirical data, has become commonplace in criminological research. Scholars see this approach as helping their chances at getting their work published in peer-reviewed journals, yet others have argued that this approach has actually hindered our understanding of criminal and deviant behavior because its outright rejection of theoretical integration is inconsistent with the body of empirical evidence pointing to its utility (McGloin et al., 2004). Either way, the comparative test is here to stay in criminology and, for better or for worse, we most certainly have Hirschi to thank for it.

Second, Hirschi (1969) provided the field with a set of operational measures for certain key variables specified by each of the major theoretical traditions in criminology. Not only did he develop social bond items that have been used in a number of subsequent studies (see Kempf, 1993), but he also provided indicators of cultural deviance and strain that researchers have used to some extent ever since. Even so, it is perhaps his measure of strain that proved to be the most controversial in the decades following the publication of *Causes of Delinquency*. In particular, not all scholars were fans of measuring strain through the “aspiration-expectation gap” that Hirschi developed. Citing the potential problem that youths are unlikely to make a cognitive distinction between the two terms—thus resulting in the measure failing to actually capture strain where it might exist—other scholars have used alternative measures, such as the perception of blocked opportunities, and have found considerably more support for strain theory than Hirschi did (see Burton & Cullen, 1992). Regardless, without the influence of Hirschi’s strain measure—flawed or not—alternative approaches for assessing the merits of strain theory probably would not have been developed.

Third, Hirschi's theory sparked an enormous level of interest among scholars seeking to test his theory. In fact, social bond/social control theory is one of the most widely tested theories in criminology, with well over 100 published tests to its credit (Akers & Sellers, 2008). And while some reviews of the literature are rather equivocal concerning the theory's empirical status (Kempf, 1993), others are more firm in concluding that it is, on balance, one of the most well-supported criminological perspectives at work in the field today. Even some of Hirschi's competitors concede that the kinds of informal social control mechanisms specified by social bond theory are important to our understanding of criminal behavior (Andrews & Bonta, 1998).

Fourth, by pitting theories against one another, Hirschi's work has had the effect of creating theoretical "camps" within criminology. Most notably, there has emerged a duel over the "control versus learning" traditions in which scholars have "taken sides" (McGloin et al., 2004). For example, both Travis Hirschi and Ronald Akers (the respective primary architects of the control and learning criminological perspectives) have had numerous doctoral students over the last four decades, who have themselves gone on to train doctoral students, and so on. The result is large groups of criminologists who are loyal to their intellectual mentors and who regularly debate one another in this control versus learning fashion at professional conferences and in the peer-reviewed journals. Whether these arguments move the field forward or are merely entertaining for viewers and readers is debatable, yet there is no denying the fact that the legacy of Hirschi is alive and well, and that the control versus learning debate is still vigorous, entrenched, and ongoing in the field of criminology.

Finally, Hirschi's theory has served as the intellectual foundation for two subsequent criminological perspectives that have themselves become major traditions in the field of criminology. First, Sampson and Laub's (1993) life course theory drew heavily upon Hirschi's original notion of social bonds; specifically, Sampson and Laub noted that changes in criminal behavior over the life course could be explained by changes in age-graded informal social control mechanisms (a topic to be discussed at greater length in Chapter 11). In essence, this perspective holds that while the kinds of social bonds that constrain our behavior change as we age (e.g., parents are important for this task when we are young, but play less of a role as we age; bonds to employment are important for those in adulthood but not so much for children; and so on), it is still the principle of social bonding and the power of informal social controls that ultimately keep our behavior in check.

Equally as important is Hirschi's work with Michael Gottfredson in their self-control theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In this work, Hirschi retained the core notion that individuals are naturally predisposed toward criminal behavior and therefore need to be restrained from

doing so, yet he rejected the notion of “indirect control” that had been a hallmark of his 1969 work. Instead, Gottfredson and Hirschi reconceptualized the control theory tradition as one of “direct control” involving individuals themselves. Viewed in this way, those who lack self-control (or, put differently, those whose parents failed to instill self-control in them; see Unnever, Cullen, & Pratt, 2003), will be impulsive, short-sighted, prone to risk taking, and will seek the very kind of immediate gratification (e.g., excitement, material goods) that criminal behavior provides. As such, the kinds of “bonds” that Hirschi specified in *Causes of Delinquency* are only important insofar as children are bonded enough to their parents for the kind of monitoring, supervision, and punishment of misbehavior that is necessary to result in the child’s self-control being inculcated (Perrone Sullivan, Pratt, & Margaryan, 2004; Pratt, Turner, & Piquero, 2004). Given what is yet another provocative theoretical statement made by Hirschi (i.e., that virtually all other competing criminological theories are “wrong”), it is no surprise that self-control theory has attracted the attention of criminologists as well, and the result has been a high level of empirical support (Pratt & Cullen, 2000). It is clear, then, that Hirschi’s influence has crept into nearly every corner of contemporary criminological thought.

CONCLUSION

In 1973, in response to slumping ticket sales and sagging profits, Major League Baseball instituted the “Designated Hitter” (DH) rule in the American League, whereby the pitcher’s place in the batting order would be replaced by a hitter who himself would not have to face the responsibility of playing defense. The working assumption among the creators of this rule was that another “big bat” in the lineup would result in greater run production, which would be more exciting to fans, which would translate into increased revenue as more people filled the stadium seats. The DH rule did just that and a lot more: Yes, runs increased, yet time-honored strategies such as stealing bases, executing the “hit and run” and the “suicide squeeze” became virtually obsolete as teams instead organized their strategies around the home run, and aging players like Reggie Jackson could extend their careers as a DH and surpass the career home run totals of players like Mickey Mantle who didn’t have the luxury of being a DH. Thus, while the core of baseball remained the same, the DH rule changed the game in a number of extremely important ways.

Travis Hirschi’s social bond/social control theory, as presented in *Causes of Delinquency*, was a similar kind of “game changer” in criminology. His work provided the field with a new idea and a new way of thinking about criminal behavior that “made sense” to the field at the time (Lilly et al., 2007). Equally important is the fact that the way he went about

presenting that idea (and his attempt to dismantle the major competitors of the time) has fundamentally changed the way criminologists “do business” to this day. And much like the DH rule in baseball, his core message has proven to be both controversial and here to stay.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Hirschi differ from other theorists with regard to his assumptions about criminal motivation? How did this difference in the initial premise inspire Hirschi to challenge the tradition of asking why people commit crime?
2. List and describe the four types of bonds, including the ways in which each bond militates against criminal conduct.
3. Describe the difference between formal and informal social control. Which type of control did Hirschi's theory pertain to? Explain your answer.
4. Explain the traditional methods of theory analysis and Hirschi's revolutionary method of comparative theory testing using empirical data. Which of these two methods ultimately became a staple of criminological research? Why?
5. List and summarize the five major influences that Hirschi's theory and methods have had on criminology.

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NOTE

1. A criticism is often leveled against Hirschi that such attachments can be criminogenic if parents, for example, are deviant themselves (The same criticism could be made regarding forming attachments to deviant peers.). This should be considered an unfair critique of Hirschi's theory, however, since a close reading of his 1969 work clearly indicates that Hirschi was referring to prosocial attachments, not any and all attachments.