social groups to make controls effective. We do not feel that a
dichotomy is involved because we assume that all personal controls are
the result of socialization and group membership, and as such, are a
measure of the effectiveness of controls exercised by the relevant social
groups. Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "Delinquency as a Failure of Personal and
196-207.

3. For a number of illustrations of the latter point, see Paul H. Landis,

4. W. I. Thomas and Znaniecki, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America,

and Brothers, 1954, Chapter 21.

6. Zucker has suggested that the affectional bond to parents is crucial.
Herbert John Zucker, "Affectional Identification and Delinquency,"
Archives of Psychology, No. 286, New York, May 1943.

18 A Control Theory of Delinquency
TRAVIS HIRSCHI

"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.

Control theories assume that delinquent acts result when an individu-
al'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 delinquency. To say that to lack of attachment to
others. To say that to lack attach-
ment to others is to be free from moral restraints is to use lack of at-
tainment to explain the guiltlessness of the psychopath, the fact that
he apparently has no conscience or superego. In his view, lack of at-
tachment to others is not merely a symptom of psychopathy, it is psy-
chopathy; 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 peculi-
arily 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

ELEMENTS OF THE BOND
ATTACHMENT
In explaining conforming behavior, sociologists justify emphasize sen-
sitivity to the opinion of others. Unfortunately, they tend to sug-
gest that man is sensitive to the opinion of others and thus exclude
sensitivity from their explanations of deviant behavior. In explaining
deviant behavior, psychologists, in contrast, emphasize sensitivity

To the opinion of others. Unfortunately, they too tend to ignore vari-
ation, and, in addition, they tend to tie sensitivity inextricably to other
variables, to make it part of a syndrome or "type," and thus seriously
reduce its value as an explanatory concept. The psychopath is char-
acterized only in part by "deficient attachment to or affection for oth-
ers, a failure to respond to the ordinary motivations founded in re-
spect or regard for one's fellows": he is also characterized by such
things as "excessive aggressiveness," "lack of superego control," and
"an infantile level of response." Unfortunately, too, the behavior that
psychopathy is used to explain often becomes part of the definition of
psychopathy. As a result, in Barbara Wootton's words: "[The psycho-
path] is... per excellence, and without shame or qualification, the
model of the circular process by which mental abnormality is inferred
from anti-social behavior while anti-social behavior is explained by
mental abnormality."
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 have "internalized" the moral 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—then he is to that extent not bound by the norms. He is free to deviate.

The essence of internalization of norms, conscience, or superego thus lies in the attachment of the individual to others. This view has several advantages over the concept of internalization. For one, explanations measured independently of his deviant behavior, in a way that it is not change or variation in behavior is explainable in a way that the divergent man is more likely after divorce to commit a number of deviant acts, such as suicide or forgery. If we explain these acts by reference to the superego (or internal control), we are forced to say that its force is the reason for the man's "lost conscience" when he got a divorce; and, of course, if he has recovered his conscience back, he remains, 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. E. Ivan Nye's "internal control" and "indirect control" refer to the same element, although we avoid the problem of explaining changes over time by looking at the "conscience" in terms of its impact on 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 tautology by asking the relationship between these empirical observations by making the relationship between them conceptually more closely associated with the next element to be discussed.

Commitment

"Of all passions, that which inclines men least to break the laws, is fear. Nay, excepting some generous natures, it is the only thing, when there is the appearance of profit or pleasure by breaking the laws, that makes men keep them." Few would deny that men on occasion obey the rules simply out of 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.

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 cost 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 commonsense. To the person committed to conventional lines of action, risking one to ten years in prison for a ten-dollar holdup is stupidity, because the committed person the costs and risks obviously exceed ten dollars in value. (To the psychoanalyst, such an act exhibits failure to the "reality-principle.") In the sociological control theory, it can be and is generally assumed that the decision to commit a criminal act may well be rationally determined—that the actor's decision was not irrational given the risks and costs he faces. Of course, as Becker points out, if the actor is capable of 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. Stinchcomb's hypothesis that "high school rebellion...occurs when future status is not clearly related to present performance" suggests that one is committed to conformity.
not only by what one has but also by what one hopes to obtain. Thus “ambition” and/or “aspiration” play an important role in producing a conventional type of 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 in these areas are presumably thought to jeopardize one’s chances in these areas are presumably thought to jeopardize one’s chances in competitive situations. Interestingly enough, even nonconventional commitments may operate to produce conventional conformity. We are told, at least, 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 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, the strain theory was devised specifically to deal with this question.) The motivation to deviate added by the strain theorist is so strong, that we can well understand the deviant act even assuming the deviant theorist believes strongly that it is wrong. However, given the control theory’s assumptions about motivation, if both the deviant and the nondeviant believe the deviant act is wrong, how do we account for the fact that one commits it and the other does not?

Control theories have taken two approaches to this problem. In one approach, beliefs are treated as mere words that mean little or nothing if the other forms of control are missing. “Semantic dementia,” the dissociation between rational faculties and emotional control
which is said to be characteristic of the psychopath, illustrates this way of handling the problem. In short, beliefs, at least insofar as they are expressed in words, drop out of the picture; since they do not differ in the for deviant and nondeviant, they are in the same terms: that is, the same word. 26

The second approach argues that the deviant rationalizes his behavior so that he can at once violate the rule and maintain his belief in the conventional assessment of delinquency. 22 We assume, in contrast, that there is variation in the extent to which people believe they should obey the social order, 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 a delinquent act 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 keynote of this argument is of course the assumption that there is variation in belief in the moral validity of social rules. This assumption...