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Social Control Theory: The Legacy of Travis Hirschi's *Causes of Delinquency*

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Abstract

The publication of Travis Hirschi's *Causes of Delinquency* in 1969 was a watershed moment in criminology. There are many reasons for the work's lasting influence. Hirschi carefully examined the underlying assumptions of extant theories of crime in light of what was known about the individual-level correlates of offending. He then developed critical tests of hypotheses derived from social control theory and competing perspectives and empirically assessed them using original self-report delinquency data. Many of his key findings, such as the negative correlation between attachment to parents and delinquency, are now established facts that any explanation of crime must consider. *Causes of Delinquency* is still cited hundreds of times per year, and it continues to spark new research and theoretical development in the field. Perhaps the most lasting legacy is the volume of criticism it has attracted and fended off, leading to its enduring contribution to the study of crime and delinquency.

INTRODUCTION

It has been 50 years since the publication of what is arguably the most influential work in twentieth-century criminology, Travis Hirschi's (1969) *Causes of Delinquency*. Hirschi himself noted more than once that his theory was based on ideas that others had before him. At the time Hirschi was conducting the research, he also had a good idea of what he would find, based in part on the findings of previous empirical research, in particular, his work with Hanan Selvin (Hirschi 2002, Hirschi & Selvin 1967). Why, then, did social control theory become so important to the field? What were the intellectual roots of the theory? How did *Causes of Delinquency* (hereafter *Causes*) change the landscape of theorizing and empirical testing? What did *Causes* get wrong? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, what is its lasting legacy? These are the key questions we address in this review. Given the massive amount of research on social control theory or inspired by it, we do not attempt to provide a complete review of the literature, conduct a meta-analysis, or respond to all the criticisms of the theory. Instead, we focus on what was unique about Hirschi's approach in *Causes* at the time it was written and on how it has influenced criminology over the past 50 years.

CRIMINOLOGY BEFORE *CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY*: CIRCA 1950–1968

The reason that social control theory was so important and influential is, we argue, a combination of several related factors. First, following Kornhauser's lead (Kornhauser 1978, 2015; see also Dooley 2015, Hirschi 2015), Hirschi began with an examination of the underlying assumptions of human nature and social order in criminological theory and refused to discount the then out-of-fashion ideas of Hobbes and Durkheim. Second, Hirschi critically evaluated how well those assumptions aligned with the known individual-level correlates of delinquency. He had a clear understanding of the nature of delinquency and the type of person who engages in delinquent acts, and this led him to reject the oversocialized images of delinquents portrayed by the dominant theories of the time. This allowed Hirschi to construct and present a parsimonious theory that fit the facts well. He avoided overcomplicating behavior that, in fact, has simple causes (natural human desires) and can manifest in trivial or serious ways. Finally, as we show in more detail in the section The Empirical Status of Social Control Theory, Hirschi not only presented his theory in *Causes*, he systematically tested hypotheses derived from social control theory against those derived from strain and cultural deviance theories, using self-report data collected in the Richmond Youth Project (RYP). What made his tests of competing hypotheses so powerful was his ingenious use of critical tests, in which evidence supporting one theory simultaneously refuted another. The testability of Hirschi's central concepts, and the fact that he included his measures of them in an appendix in *Causes*, also facilitated testing of the theory in subsequent self-report delinquency research.

Examination of Assumptions

In chapter 1 of *Causes*, Hirschi presents an overview of the three major perspectives on delinquency at the time: strain theories, control theories, and cultural deviance theories. His discussion in this chapter foreshadows much of his empirical analysis in the chapters that follow, outlining the assumptions underlying each perspective and presenting critiques of each based on his knowledge of the individual-level correlates of delinquency. Hirschi (1969, p. 5) presents strain or anomie theories as assuming that "man is a moral animal who desires to obey the rules," which means that there must be a great deal of pressure to force people to behave in ways inconsistent with

the desires of others and inconsistent with their own internalized norms. For strain theory, crime represents an attempt to achieve one's internalized goals, and those goals are internalized versions of American cultural prescriptions to achieve wealth. Hirschi (1969, p. 6) quotes Merton, "… a cardinal American virtue, 'ambition,' promotes a cardinal American vice, 'deviant behavior.'" Hirschi's criticism of this view of deviance centers on three empirical claims: (*a*) Most delinquent acts are trivial, and most delinquent individuals conform most of the time; (*b*) there is little evidence for a link between social class and self-reported delinquency, and (*c*) individual aspirations vary a great deal, contrary to Merton's logic, and high aspirations do not appear to be conducive to delinquency. Essentially, Hirschi argues that strain theories overpredict crime, particularly among the lower classes, and ultimately hinge on an assumption that is contrary to fact, the idea that aspirations for occupational and educational success are uniformly high. This leads Hirschi (1969, pp. 9–10) to "tentatively reject" strain theories as "inadequate and misleading."

Hirschi's presentation of control theories in chapter 1 of *Causes* centers on the Hobbesian question. Unlike strain theories, which ask why men do not obey the rules of society, control theories ask, "'Why do men obey the rules of society?' Deviance is taken for granted; conformity must be explained" (Hirschi 1969, p. 10). As has often been noted in textbook overviews of social control theory, this is one of the aspects of control theory that so clearly contrasts it with other theories of crime. For control theory, no strong motivation is necessary to explain crime, and strain theory's "moral man" is replaced with the view that morality varies—some individuals are constrained by moral concerns, others are relatively free of them. We are not inherently inclined to put others' interests before our own, but the social order requires that we do so to be accepted and successful.

Hirschi's (1969, p. 11) presentation of cultural deviance theories centered on their view that people "cannot commit acts deviant by [their] own standards," because criminal behavior is learned from one's social group by learning definitions that favor crime. In contrast with social control theory's view of variation in the desire to conform to the norms of others, cultural deviance theories see crime as the result of universal adherence to the norms of one's culture. Faulting Sutherland's method of analytic induction for creating a theory that is so broad as to be unfalsifiable, Hirschi suspended judgment on the theory. He noted that if definitions favorable to violation of law merely free people to commit crime, then the theory is not easy to distinguish from control theories. If definitions require delinquency, the theory is both falsifiable and, Hirschi claimed, false.

Examination of Assumptions in Light of Empirical Data

Hirschi was not the only scholar to begin a classic work with attention to underlying assumptions. In fact, Merton's (1938, p. 672) first paragraph in *Social Structure and Anomie* focuses on the (according to him, mistaken) assumption in social theory that crime results from "imperious biological drives which are not adequately restrained by social control." Merton (1938, p. 672) rejected this assumption because it did not allow identification of "nonbiological conditions which induce deviations from prescribed patterns of conduct," and stated his goal as identifying "social structures that *exert a definite pressure* on some people to commit crime." Similarly, Sutherland et al.'s (1992, p. 70) statement of differential association theory is presented as a contrast to the assumptions of "economic" theories and control theories, which are overly "individualistic, intellectualistic, and voluntaristic." There is no evidence in the classic works of these theorists to suggest that their rejection of the assumptions of the classical school of criminology was the result of careful consideration of their validity.

A possible explanation for Merton's and Sutherland's overly hasty rejection of these assumptions is that their theories, and most other theories at the time, were largely based on ecological

data (Hirschi 1969, p. 15, note 44). Merton and Sutherland (as well as most other prominent theorists of the time such as Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay) focused largely on macrolevel patterns of crime and delinquency drawn from official crime statistics. Although these theorists were clearly aware of the major individual-level correlates of crime and delinquency such as age, sex, and family functioning (see, e.g., chapters 5 and 9 in Sutherland 1934), they did not adequately appreciate the need for theory to account for the fact that crime rates are highest among teen or young adult males who come from homes in which the quality of family relationships and/or parenting, in general, was low. Merton and Sutherland were apparently wedded to the idea that for a theory to be truly sociological, it had to locate the cause of crime in some aspect of social life.[1] They rejected the unfashionable idea that crime could come naturally, without, it seems, careful consideration of whether the facts of crime could fit a Hobbesian or Durkheimian conception.[2] Sutherland's offender was perfectly integrated into his or her social group to the extent that norm violation was not possible (Kornhauser 1978); Merton's offender was perfectly socialized to the cultural prescription for the achievement of monetary success. These conceptions fit patterns of crime evident in official crime statistics: Official crime and delinquency are concentrated in lower-class urban areas, and delinquency is largely a group phenomenon. However, when one views these images of offenders in light of several key attributes of the typical delinquent, their limitations become clear.

At the time Hirschi was writing, he was, of course, well aware of the current state of knowledge about crime and delinquency (see Hirschi & Selvin 1967), and in fact had tried to obtain Glueck & Glueck's (1950) *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* data to analyze for his dissertation research (Laub 2002). Thus, Hirschi knew that there were substantively important differences between delinquents and nondelinquents on parental supervision, family bonds, school performance, liking school, educational aspirations, and delinquent peers.

The image of the offender one gathers from this constellation of individual attributes is not of one perfectly socialized to anything but rather one who is not even well integrated into his or her own family or school, the two most important and influential social institutions for youths. Furthermore, delinquents generally show little interest in or inclination toward pursuing the symbols of success or the keys to a comfortable existence in American society, education and a good job. Hirschi rejected the notion that an alternative value system or reward structure existed in our society, so the notion that delinquents were somehow wedded to a competing system of moral beliefs or an alternative reward structure seemed implausible and was not supported by the empirical evidence at that time (e.g., Briar & Piliavin 1965, Hirschi & Selvin 1967). Hirschi's careful attention to these individual attributes undoubtedly helped him arrive at an explanation for delinquency that was more consistent with empirical reality than Sutherland and Merton's conceptualizations, and this was one key reason that *Causes* was so influential.

Social Control Theory in a Nutshell

Hirschi (1969, p. 16) begins the presentation of his theory in chapter 2 with a quote from Durkheim's *Suicide*, "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." The source of conformity,

[1] For Hirschi, social relationships facilitate conformity, not crime.

[2] The unfashionable nature of such ideas is evidenced by a critique of Hirschi's thinking as "stuck in the eighteenth century" (cited in Hirschi 2002, p. x). Matza (1964, p. 5) similarly refers to the claim that the notion of behavior being an outcome of free will is "prescientific." For more on Hirschi's take on criminological thinking at the time, see Hirschi (1973).

for Hirschi, is the social bond, which gives us something to lose through crime. The social bond comprises four elements that Hirschi argued are interrelated but analytically separable: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief.

Attachment to others refers to our emotional connection to others. To the extent that we like, love, or respect others, we are sensitive to their opinions of us. Following Hobbes and Durkheim, Hirschi assumed that social order is based on consensus. Thus, he assumed that parents, teachers, and others uniformly disapprove of behaviors that are disruptive, dishonest, and hurtful. Therefore, engaging in those behaviors will result in negative consequences for the individual. In contrast to Merton's views, Hirschi argued that a commitment to long-term educational or occupational goals acts as a deterrent to delinquency because the successful attainment of these goals is jeopardized by violating the rules of the social institutions that provide educational and occupational rewards. Hirschi's most straightforward prediction was that involvement in conventional activities like school, sports, or an after-school job reduces the time available for delinquent acts. Finally, Hirschi contended that there is variation in belief in the moral validity of laws. For strain theories, deprivation and desperation provide sufficient motivation for us to violate laws in which we believe; for cultural deviance theories, people do not violate the norms of their own groups at all. But for control theory, some people, in part as a result of their lack of attachment to others, simply do not feel that laws and rules are morally binding on their behavior and are thus free to deviate from them.

THE PUBLICATION OF *CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY*, 1969

With the publication of *Causes* in 1969, Travis Hirschi's book dominated the intellectual discussion and substantially formed the research agenda for the field of criminology. One of the trademark qualities of *Causes* was profound theoretical insights coupled with rigorous research methods. It is thus not surprising that one of us (Laub) has argued that the publication of *Causes* is one of the turning points in the history of criminology (see Laub 2004). In this book, Hirschi developed and tested a theory of social control capitalizing on the idea of social bonding. In contrast to then-popular delinquency theories that focused on motivations for delinquency, social control theories focused on the restraints and circumstances that prevent delinquency. In *Causes*, the delinquent is viewed as "relatively free of the intimate attachments, the aspirations, and the moral beliefs that bind most people to a life within the law" (Hirschi 1969, preface). The theoretical focus then is on the socialization processes that constrain antisocial and delinquent behavior that comes to all individuals naturally. The key question is, "Why do men obey the rules of society?" For Hirschi, delinquency occurs when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken.

What was unique about *Causes* at the time was that Hirschi developed his theory of delinquency and then tested his own theory as well as other popular theories of delinquency using empirical data derived from self-reports from adolescents about their attitudes and behavior. This testing approach to assessing theories of crime and delinquency became the standard in the field. As Akers (1994, p. 116) has pointed out, Hirschi's "combination of theory construction, conceptualization, operationalization, and empirical testing was virtually unique in criminology at that time and stands as a model today."

Social control theory rose to prominence as a major theory of delinquency in 1969 with the publication of *Causes*. One of us (Laub) did an extensive interview with Hirschi in the preparation of a collection of Hirschi papers called *The Craft of Criminology* (Laub 2002). One of the topics discussed in the interview was the source of the idea of social control. Was it through the reading of Durkheim and Hobbes and trying to understand social order? Hirschi responded:

> It seems to me obvious in Durkheim and especially Hobbes. Control theory is inherent in attempts to solve the problem of order. Hobbes's question is this: Given our natural tendency to pursue our short term private interests, how is society possible? The question does not assume that we are naturally evil. It assumes only that we have a tendency to act, and the ability to consider what will follow. Put another way, it assumes that behavior is a function of its consequences. This idea is found in lots of places: law, economics, biology, physics, psychology, religion, even sociology. If the bubble doesn't minimize its volume, it will no longer be a bubble. Michael [Gottfredson] and I conclude in an as of now unpublished paper, "The Punishment of Children from the Perspective of Control Theory," that natural sanctions are as important as parental sanctions in child rearing. The hot stove and the fall from the tree teach the child to think about what's coming. Indeed, the parent's job is often to protect the child from such penalties rather than add to them. (The connection between accidents and crime shows itself at an early age!) This puts a new light on permissiveness or tolerance. Uptight squares remind us of the consequences of deviance, consequences that occur whether they remind us or not. We label behavior deviant to warn ourselves and others that such behavior is dangerous or imprudent. When you consider the longevity of good religious folk, you begin to see the wisdom of "moral" systems. So there is a rationality to them, no matter how stupid you think they are (Laub 2002, p. xxiii).

Hirschi perhaps more than any other delinquency theorist also brought the family, especially family relations, back into the picture. Empirical research has consistently found that family variables, especially poor family functioning and childrearing practices, are strongly associated with delinquent behavior (for a review see, e.g., Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). However, the role of the family in theories of delinquency, especially in many sociological theories, was largely ignored throughout the 1960s and 1970s [see, e.g., Cloward & Ohlin's (1960) differential opportunity theory]. As noted by Hirschi, this neglect has also generated a marked divergence between both empirical findings and the conventional wisdom of the general public—especially parents—and the views of social scientists who study criminal behavior (see Hirschi 1983). Hirschi's theory of social control rectified this situation.

Some scholars have thought that cultural deviance/learning theory was the real enemy of social control theory and not so much Merton and strain theory. Yet in Laub's interview with Hirschi much of the discussion, especially regarding the work of Kornhauser and the origins of the RYP, focused on strain theory and the work of Merton. Nevertheless, the debate between differential association theory/social learning theory and social control theory seems to be much more long-lasting. Hirschi reacted to this in the interview:

> Oh, it is more long lasting. I have no interest in joining a debate with Merton, or Cohen, or Cloward and Ohlin. Goffman said it. Strain theory represents the horrors, the nightmares, of middle class people who imagine what it would be like to be shut out of the process of accumulation. (LAUGHTER) It's a terrible thing, but it has nothing to do with crime. (LAUGHTER) To test cultural deviance or social learning theory we need a crucial experiment that will allow us to discover what people actually know about crime and when their information is acquired. I have grandchildren. It is hard to believe some of the crimes I have heard them articulate. I am beginning to think that social control theory does not go far enough in terms of natural tendencies. (LAUGHTER) They imagine all sorts of horrible, violent acts. They can articulate them but they can't commit them. The idea that you have to learn such things from others is a mystery to me. So I think the natural enemy is cultural deviance (Laub 2002, p. xxv).

Since the publication of *Causes* in 1969, some have identified Hirschi as the spokesperson for control theory. Drawing on Laub's (2002) interview, it is clear he is not happy with this label. Hirschi admits that before Michael Gottfredson came along he was virtually alone in defending the theory, but he says there were three good reasons for doing so. First, his version of the theory had received the bulk of research attention. Second, none of those identified as control theorists—e.g., Ivan Nye, Albert Reiss, Jackson Toby, Irving Piliavin, Walter Reckless, and Howard Becker—came to its assistance. None of these scholars has continued developing ideas surrounding control

theory, testing aspects of the theory, or defending its tenets from criticism. Some, Hirschi points out, did not do so because they did not see themselves as criminologists. Some refrained because they, in fact, do not see themselves as control theorists and did not accept basic tenets of the theory. Others have simply moved on to other interests (Laub 2002, p. xxvi).

Hirschi's third reason for defending control theory is that he believes it is superior to alternative schemes. In his interview, Hirschi said,

> None of this stuff about my role is relevant to the validity of control theory. The "spokesperson" label is shorthand for the charge that I merely borrowed a theory developed by contemporary scholars insufficiently interested to pursue it further. This is a variant of the "old wine in new bottles" slur now in use against self-control as well as social control theory. When I taught research methods, I did not use "originality" as a criterion for judging theories. I don't think it is appropriate today (Laub 2002, p. xxvi).

Reactions from the Field

The reviews of *Causes* were generally quite favorable. James F. Short, Jr., stated, "The hallmark of the study is its systematic focus on important theoretical issues, using the most advanced survey methods and analytical techniques. The consistency of findings is remarkable. The presentation is lively, unencumbered by obscure language or logic, brilliantly argued. It is a work of major consequence" (back cover of *Causes*, Hirschi 1969). Along similar lines, a review in the *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* by Don Gibbons (1970, p. 236) concluded that "this is a highly significant piece of research which provides a serious challenge to the popular wisdom in criminology regarding delinquency." In the *Harvard Educational Review*, Thomas J. Cottle (1970, p. 681) wrote, "Travis Hirschi's *Causes of Delinquency* is not merely a turning point in deviancy research. It is a book about adolescents, about Americans, a book, dare I say it, about America. It should be read then reread by those who, as they say, care about our people, and especially those whose private worlds of genuine concern often seem to by-pass an implacable reality. At this moment, Hirschi's exceptional knowledge seems indispensable if prejudices are ever to be ripped away from our vision and drained from our minds."

In his review of *Causes*, Edwin Lemert (1970, p. 190) wrote,

> *Causes of Delinquency* presents a carefully reasoned theory of delinquency articulated with survey research data. Hirschi reduces all delinquency theories to variations of strain, cultural deviance, and social control. With all the aplomb of a latter-day Durkheim, he weighs the theories deductively, then proceeds to their testing, leaving no doubts about his preferences for social control theory. In substance this, too, is classic Durkheim, with such things as bond, attachments, and involvement with conventional society about the sources of conformity, and their obverse the bedding grounds for deviance. In the absence of internalized controls people will deviate, hence no special motivation is needed.

Lemert (1970, p. 191) does raise a critical concern at the end of the review. He stated,

> Hirschi's craftsmanship is well-nigh impeccable, and he represents survey analysis at its best. But it may be wondered if all his piety and wit can erase the shadowy questions about reliability and validity of questionnaire data. An even more serious doubt is whether he has isolated causes of delinquency or simply found associations between self-reported delinquency, facts, and attitudes, the order of whose occurrence remains problematic.

The most negative review came from H.B. Gibson (1970, p. 452) in the *Sociological Review*. Gibson wrote that "He [Hirschi] is somewhat involved in pitting a psychological explanation of crime against sociological theories, but he takes his psychology straight from Thomas Hobbes and

seems stuck in the eighteenth century. He seems quite unaware of the great body of psychological research and theory relevant to criminology." Gibson goes on to say that Hirschi's methods are of "rather poor quality," and the 51-page questionnaire administered to children is a "disaster." Gibson (1970, p. 453) concludes that in light of the poor methodology, Hirschi "is entitled to his opinions and theories, but it would be very rash for anyone to base any firm conclusion on such data." He ended his review with the following: "This book cannot be recommended to students. Librarians seeing the price…on a book so modest in size, if not in pretentions, may wonder about their budgets" (Gibson 1970, p. 453).

Hirschi's Reflections on the Reissuing of *Causes of Delinquency* in 2002

In 2002, Transaction Publishers reissued *Causes* and included a new introduction by the author. Hirschi recounted that he was contacted in 1980 by the editors of *Current Contents* to account for the fact that *Causes* was determined to be a citation classic. Hirschi (2002, p. ix) attributed the book's success to four key elements: "the social control theory of delinquency it advocates; its findings on the correlates of delinquency; the set of data on which it is based; and…the methodology it employs." Hirschi noted that "The ideas that I found exciting and obviously consistent with available data had been treated as contrary to fact, passé, and even appalling."

In the new introduction, Hirschi argued that *Causes* is more frequently cited than ever, but *Causes* is no longer standing alone in its defense of control theory. Other books included *Social Sources of Delinquency*: *An Appraisal of Analytic Models* by Ruth Kornhauser (1978), *Controlling Crime*: *The Classical Perspective in Criminology* by Bob Roshier (1988), *A General Theory of Crime* by Michael Gottfredson & Travis Hirschi (1990), and *Crime in the Making*: *Pathways and Turning Points Through Life* by Robert Sampson & John Laub (1993). Hirschi proceeded to outline the connections between *Causes* and each of these four books (see Hirschi 2002, pp. xi–xiv). Hirschi (2002, p. xi) hoped "that the book [*Causes of Delinquency*] may be better understood by examining its consequences as well as its origins."

Finally, Hirschi assessed why social control theory was frequently tested by empirical researchers. He said for research purposes the structure and content of the theory were appealing. An individual's bond to society had several dimensions, and his notion of society captured a wide range of persons, groups, and institutions. Furthermore, the focus on the individual made the theory compatible with survey research, the dominant method in the social sciences at the time. Hirschi concluded that "what is surprising is not how many researchers have tested the particular theory found in *Causes of Delinquency*, but how few advanced alternative versions within the control theory framework" (Hirschi 2002, p. xviii).

THE EMPIRICAL STATUS OF SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY

To say that social control theory has been extensively tested would be an understatement. Despite Hirschi's theoretical shift toward self-control theory later in his career (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990), social control theory continues to be tested in current research, continues to be cited hundreds of times per year, according to Google Scholar, and is still frequently the focus of doctoral dissertations (e.g., Ford 2017, Van Glad 2018).

In 1973, Michael Hindelang (1973) predicted that Hirschi's operationalization of control theory's concepts would lead future tests of the theory to be less ambiguous than tests of theories that were not operationalized by the theorist who developed them. Unfortunately, this prediction has not been realized. Despite the extensive testing of social control theory, summarizing the research on the theory is complicated by the wide range and varying quality of measures used to test it. For

example, operationalization of attachment to parents ranges from a single indicator of how well the respondent gets along with his or her parents (Friedman & Rosenbaum 1988, McGee 1992) to indexes that incorporate a number of dimensions of attachment as outlined by Hirschi (Krohn & Massey 1980) to indexes that combine attachment to parents, peers, and the school in a single measure (Junger-Tas 1992, Thompson et al. 1984). Operationalization of commitment ranges from straightforward measures of educational aspirations (Lauritsen 1994) to indexes that incorporate elements of the bond other than commitment, such as attachment to school or involvement in school-related activities (Costello & Vowell 1999, Gardner & Shoemaker 1989).

This variation in the operationalization of key components of the theory, in addition to variations in the operationalization of crime and delinquency and methods of data analysis used in studies of social control theory, makes blanket generalizations about existing research risky. However, it is safe to say that some of Hirschi's key predictions have been well supported by a variety of measures, methods, and samples. The vast array of research demonstrates that attachment to parents, attachment to school, and commitment are negatively associated with delinquency.

Attachment to Parents

Hirschi's test of the attachment hypothesis focused on the child's attachment to parents as being particularly important in reducing the likelihood of delinquency. His original test examined three dimensions of attachment to parents: virtual supervision, intimacy of communication with parents, and affectional identification. On all three counts, Hirschi found strong support for the attachment hypothesis. Children who perceived their parents as aware of their activities, who had higher levels of communication with parents, and who reported greater affectional identification with parents were substantially less likely to report delinquency. As noted above, one of the unique aspects of *Causes* was Hirschi's focus on testing competing hypotheses. Hirschi contrasted the control theory take on attachment to parents against cultural deviance theories by testing the hypothesis that attachment to parents is related to delinquency only through its effect on the likelihood of youths having delinquent friends. Contrary to the cultural deviance hypothesis, the effect of attachment to parents held regardless of the number of delinquent friends and despite the fact that boys with more delinquent friends were more likely to report delinquency. Addressing Miller's (1958) theory of lower-class culture, Hirschi found that the effect of attachment to parents held even among groups likely to subscribe to a supposed lower-class set of values—both black and white boys whose fathers held unskilled or semiskilled jobs were more likely to be delinquent when they were less attached to their fathers. These findings are clearly contrary to Miller's view that delinquency results from adherence to the unique norms of the lower class.

The predicted relationship between attachment to parents and delinquency has been more frequently tested than any other derived from social control theory (Kempf 1993), and it has been very well supported in subsequent research (Costello et al. 2006, Heimer 1996, Hindelang 1973, Hoeve et al. 2012, Kierkus & Baer 2002, Krohn & Massey 1980, Laub & Sampson 1988, Mack et al. 2007, Marcos et al. 1986, Patterson & Dishion 1985, Rankin & Kern 1994, Wadsworth 2000, Wiatrowski & Anderson 1987). The negative relationship between attachment to parents and crime or delinquency holds in a wide range of samples from different historical periods, including the Glueck sample of white males collected in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s (Glueck & Glueck 1950, Sampson & Laub 1993), boys from four different ethnic groups living in the Netherlands in the 1990s (Junger & Marshall 1997), and high school students in Ankara, Turkey, in 2001 (Özbay & Özcan 2006). The negative relationship between attachment to parents and delinquency is one of the rare findings that is so robust that it is safe to call it a fact of delinquency. The only real point of contention in the literature regarding attachment to

parents is the underlying causal mechanism linking it to delinquency. Despite Hirschi's findings, some argue that attachment to parents affects delinquency only indirectly through its effect on association with delinquent peers. We discuss this issue further below.

Attachment to School

The relation between attachment to school and delinquency was assessed with measures of academic ability and performance, how much the student reported liking school, concern for teachers' opinions, and acceptance of the school's authority to set rules for behavior. Hirschi argued that students higher in academic ability find school rewarding and tend to like school more than those who do not do well in school. Those who like school and care what their teachers think of them have greater respect for the school's authority and should be less likely to be delinquent.

Hirschi's findings supported all these predictions. The effects of academic ability were weaker than those of the other variables, but all were related to delinquency as predicted. Further, Hirschi assessed the extent to which a boy's feelings about school were explicable with strain theory mechanisms, e.g., whether frustration was likely to intervene between poor performance and delinquency. This strain theory hypothesis was not supported, as shown by the lack of relationship between delinquency and the boy's report of feeling nervous or tense in school and by the overall finding of delinquents' indifference to rather than antagonism toward school. Finally, Hirschi analyzed the relationship between attachment to school and delinquency, controlling for varying levels of attachment to the father. He found that attachment to school reduced the likelihood of delinquency regardless of the level of attachment to the father.

Attachment to school has often been reconceptualized in tests of social control theory. Most commonly, some aspects of attachment to school are considered to be elements of commitment to conventional goals and/or involvement in school-related activities such as homework (Costello & Vowell 1999, Krohn & Massey 1980, Torstensson 1990), and in some cases attachment to school is viewed as one aspect of overall attachment to others (Thompson et al. 1984). Research in education conceptualizes attachment to school as emotional engagement with school and differentiates it from cognitive and behavioral engagement, which align to some extent with Hirschi's concepts of commitment to long-term goals and involvement in conventional activities (see, e.g., Hirschfield & Gasper 2011). Most research analyzing the effect of attachment to school on delinquency, using variables such as liking school, having higher academic ability, being concerned about teachers' opinions, perceptions of teachers' interest, and overall positive attitudes toward school, finds that youths who are more attached to school are less likely to be delinquent, consistent with Hirschi's predictions (Burkett & Jensen 1975, Caplan & LeBlanc 1985, Hindelang 1973, Hirschfield & Gasper 2011, Junger & Marshall 1997, McGee 1992, Özbay & Özcan 2006, Patterson & Dishion 1985, Rosenbaum 1987, Sampson & Laub 1993, Wiatrowski et al. 1981, Williams et al. 1999). Wiatrowski & Anderson (1987) found no effect of attachment to teachers on delinquency but did find that overall attachment to school is one of the strongest predictors of delinquency.

Some have suggested that the causal direction between school attachment or engagement and delinquency might be reversed, or that the relationship might be reciprocal (Hirschfield & Gasper 2011, Thornberry et al. 1991). In this conceptualization, a youth's prior delinquent behavior or poor behavior in school might lead to poor treatment in school, which results in a lower level of attachment to teachers and to school in general, contributing to further delinquent behavior. It is also possible that underlying characteristics of individuals, such as self-control, are causally prior to both early delinquent behavior and attachment to school (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990).

However, it is important to recognize that Hirschi conceptualized each of the elements of an individual's bond to society as related to the others. As he put it, "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" (Hirschi 1969, p. 27). The implications of this holistic view of the social bond are important for research investigating causal directions between various elements of the bond and for research looking at the influence of one element on delinquency while controlling for others. Thus, although there is evidence that prior delinquency can lead to future disengagement in school, this raises the question of the causes of prior delinquency in the first place. Given the logical necessity of attachment to parents being causally prior to both delinquency and all the other elements of the social bond, any effect of delinquency on future social bonds such as attachment to school cannot, in and of itself, be taken as evidence against social control theory. Hirschi (1969, pp. 245–46) recognized the potential problems with testing social control theory in regression analyses that look for the effect of one variable on delinquency holding other elements of the social bond constant. Although it is perfectly reasonable for researchers primarily interested in one variable, like attachment to school, to hold constant other known correlates of delinquency, like attachment to parents, we contend that this kind of multivariate test cannot properly be seen as a test of social control theory as a whole. We conclude, then, that there is a robust association between attachment to school and delinquency and that the relationship is sufficiently strong that it is another fact of delinquency. Further, the relationship between attachment to school and delinquency should not be considered in isolation from the other correlates of delinquency, such as attachment to parents.

Commitment to Conventional Lines of Action

In Hirschi's tests of the commitment hypothesis, he found strong support for his predictions and virtually no support for competing predictions derived from strain theory. Boys in his study who had higher educational and occupational aspirations were significantly less likely to engage in delinquency, and this finding held even among those likely to face obstacles to their success. An analysis of the black boys in the sample, for example, showed that those who perceived their occupational chances as being limited by racial discrimination despite their self-assessed ability to achieve these goals were not more likely to be delinquent than those who perceived high ability and no discrimination-based blockage to goal achievement (Hirschi 1969). Overall, Hirschi's findings provided strong support for the notion that those who desire to achieve some occupational or educational goal and, more importantly, those who are actively working toward their goals are less likely to be delinquent. Hirschi concluded that the strain theory image of the delinquent as a striver with frustrated ambitions is false and that the control theory portrayal of the delinquent as one with little investment in either present or future endeavors is more consistent with the data.

Most of the subsequent research examining the relationship between commitment to conventional goals and delinquency has found evidence in support of Hirschi's predictions; those who have high aspirations and who work hard in school are less likely to be delinquent. Commitment has typically been measured with indicators of occupational and educational aspirations (Agnew 1985, Krohn & Massey 1980, Rosenbaum 1987, Torstensson 1990, Wadsworth 2000, Wiatrowski et al. 1981) and education-related variables like the perceived importance of getting good grades (Hindelang 1973, Junger-Tas 1992) and working hard in school (Caplan & LeBlanc 1985, Friedman & Rosenbaum 1988, Liljeberg et al. 2011, Welsh et al. 1999). Overall, then, there is a great deal of support for Hirschi's predictions about the relationship between commitment and delinquency, and at the same time there is little support for the strain theory claim that frustrated aspirations are an important cause of delinquency.

Involvement in Conventional Activities

Ironically, the most common-sense hypothesis derived from social control theory was resoundingly disproved by Hirschi's analysis. There was essentially no relationship between delinquency and measures of involvement in conventional activities, including sports, hobbies, watching television, reading, working around the house, and working at paid jobs. Hirschi argued that these results were due to the fact that most delinquent acts can be performed very quickly and that some of the most delinquent boys in the sample had probably spent only a few hours per year engaged in delinquent behavior.

Hirschi and subsequent researchers have noted the qualitative differences in different types of conventional activities, something Hirschi (1969) failed to recognize prior to his test of the theory. There is good support for the negative relationship between time spent on homework and delinquency (Barnes et al. 2007, Burkett & Jensen 1975, Caplan & LeBlanc 1985, Wiatrowski et al. 1981), for example, and we now know that time spent with peers and working a lot of hours at paid employment are conducive to delinquency, possibly because those activities provide delinquent opportunities (Barnes et al. 2007, Osgood & Anderson 2004, Staff et al. 2010, Uggen & Wakefield 2008, Welsh et al. 1999, Wong 2005). In any case, it is clear from the literature that Hirschi's prediction that busy youths would be less likely to commit crime is largely false.

Attachment to Friends, Friends' Delinquency, and Beliefs

There is a long history of debate between proponents of cultural deviance/social learning theories and social control theorists. The root of this debate lies in the well-established relationship between delinquent peers and delinquency and on the fact that delinquent behavior tends to occur in groups. The earliest positivist work in criminology noted these facts, and they are undisputed in the literature. The issue, therefore, is why these relationships exist.

Hirschi was well aware of the relationship between delinquent friends and delinquency before writing *Causes*, and his analysis of the Richmond data showed the same relationship—boys with delinquent friends, as measured by police contacts or by reports of teachers' opinions of these friends, were more likely to be delinquent. Cultural deviance theories, and to some extent strain theories, posit an important causal role of delinquent peers—delinquent peer groups are seen as highly solidary and capable of transmitting deviant norms to their members. Control theory, in contrast, holds that belonging to delinquent peer groups is a result rather than a cause of delinquency, or that the relationship between delinquent peers and delinquency is spurious due to the effects of a low stake in conformity. Control theory is also at odds with the image of the delinquent group or gang as solidary and as capable of exerting great influence over its members. Rather, control theory holds that members of delinquent groups tend to have only weak bonds to each other and to have weak bonds in other respects as well (e.g., to parents and school).

Hirschi first examined the relationship between other social bonds and attachment to friends. He found that youths who are attached to their parents and have greater "achievement orientation" (see Hirschi 1969, p. 178) are more likely to be attached to their peers as well. Again, then, Hirschi's findings pointed out the importance of considering the social bond as a unified construct, which cultural deviance theories fail to adequately account for. Further analysis revealed that boys with stronger social bonds were less likely to have delinquent friends, those more strongly attached to friends were less likely to be delinquent regardless of how delinquent their friends were, and the stronger the stake in conformity, the weaker the correlation between delinquent friends and delinquency. Hirschi concluded from these findings that the likelihood of having delinquent friends is largely dependent on a self-selection process, which is set in motion by weak social bonds, and that it is unlikely that the peer group has a powerful influence over the boy's delinquency.

With regard to belief, Hirschi again found that the boys who had stronger social bonds in other respects were likely to have greater belief in the moral validity of the law. Both stronger bonds and greater belief were associated with lower levels of delinquency. Hirschi found no evidence to support the idea of a lower-class subculture, contrary to Miller's (1958) arguments. For example, 62% of the boys who had committed delinquent acts disagreed with the statement that "it is all right to get around the law if you can get away with it."[3] Hirschi noted that the finding of a correlation between crime and holding beliefs tolerant of crime is consistent with cultural explanations, but he argued that the classic statements of differential association and social learning theories could not explain the relationship between stakes in conformity and association with delinquent peers or the relationship between stakes in conformity and delinquency that remains when the variable of delinquent friends is controlled.

Hirschi concluded his examination of these issues with the claim that "'how much feathering precedes how much flocking' is the key theoretical problem in the field of delinquency" (1969, p. 159). The years of debate that followed between proponents of differential association/social learning theory and control theories proved this comment prescient (see, e.g., Akers 1996; Costello 1997; Costello & Vowell 1999; Hirschi 1996; Matsueda 1982, 1988). This debate centers on several key research findings that appear to support cultural deviance theories. First, as Hirschi (1969, p. 153) acknowledged, the relationship between delinquency and peer delinquency is strong and cannot be fully accounted for by self-selection (although self-selection does account for a large share of it). Second, measures of attitudes toward crime, whether labeled belief, techniques of neutralization, or definitions favorable to law violation, are strongly related to crime. Third, the relationship between attachment to friends and delinquency has not been consistently found to be negative, and some research finds a positive relationship (although measures of attachment are often poor, such as in studies that use time spent with friends as the sole measure of attachment to them).

However, there are some key points that learning theories have failed to adequately consider or account for. Perhaps most importantly, there is essentially no evidence to support the existence of anything resembling delinquent or criminal subcultures that teach their members norms promoting crime. The centrality of these two claims to cultural deviance theories is indisputable, despite attempts at backpedaling on these issues. For example, Akers (see, e.g., 1996) has claimed that the theory does not propose that deviant norms require deviance, merely that they allow it. The logical difficulties of this position have been discussed elsewhere (Costello 1997), and the idea that people who engage in a behavior are more accepting of the behavior than people who do not is consistent with several different theoretical perspectives (see Hirschi 1969, Sampson 1999). For too long, proponents of learning theories simply assumed that a causal effect of peer delinquency provided evidence for their theory and contrary to control theory, without adequately considering alternatives (Warr 2002). Despite the fact that many scholars do not seem to be aware of it (e.g., McGloin & Thomas 2019), even Hirschi (1969, p. 161) acknowledged the likelihood that friends had a causal influence on delinquency when he stated that "these criminal influences are beyond the reach of control theory."

[3]Most studies of learning theories do not directly address the question of whether there is evidence of a deviant subculture—instead, they focus on individual variation in responses to questions measuring normative attitudes. With approximately 78% of those who had not committed delinquent acts disagreeing with that statement, there is sufficient variation to show that those who agree with the statement are more likely to have committed delinquent acts (see Hirschi 1969, table 80). This is one way that the use of more sophisticated methods of analysis typically used in research subsequent to *Causes* can lead us away from the big picture—the individual relationship is consistent with both control and learning theories, but the typically neglected fact that few delinquents agree with it essentially disproves learning theories. In addition, the use of attitudinal measures of culture is controversial, and sociologists of culture argue against this conceptualization and measurement of culture (see, e.g., Swidler 1986).

His conclusion may have been too hasty. Most notably, there is a great deal of evidence that peers can cause delinquency by providing opportunities for crime that would not exist, or would be substantially less attractive, in their absence (Osgood & Anderson 2004). Furthermore, although peer pressure as an important contributor to deviance has been discounted by virtually everyone (Akers 1998, Warr 2002), there is evidence that it can play a role in fostering both deviant and prosocial behaviors (Costello & Hope 2016). This evidence is quite consistent with social control theory. Opportunity-based explanations of peer effects are consistent with the view that crime requires no special motivation and does not require strong drives or desires to live up to the expectations of one's culture. There is also evidence that the process of influencing one's peers toward deviance has selfish motives, just as crime itself does (Costello & Zozula 2018). Badgering one's friends to engage in behavior that could get them in trouble, land them in jail, or leave them with a bad hangover is hardly consistent with the image of group socialization to values that promote crime. It is much more consistent with the control theory view of offenders as people who have relatively weak social bonds and are free to deviate when the opportunity arises. Although Hirschi (1969, p. 230) may not have done enough to consider "what delinquency does *for* the adolescent," social control theory is completely compatible with the views that friends provide easy opportunities to commit crime that might not exist otherwise, that drinking with friends is more fun than drinking alone, and the added fun to be had by having someone else to be bad with is sufficient to motivate friends to lead each other into deviant behavior.

WHAT IS MISSING?

Considerations of Sex and Race

Critiques of social control theory have often noted that Hirschi analyzed data from only the white males in the RYP, although data from black males and black and white girls were available in the sample. For example, feminist researchers have argued that traditional theories of crime like social control theory were developed by and about males, and question the extent to which they can explain processes leading to female delinquency or the sex difference in levels of delinquency (Daly & Chesney-Lind 1988). Messerschmidt (1993, p. 3) argued that Hirschi's omission of girls from his analysis in *Causes* indicated that it was "incapable of deciphering the gendered nature of crime." With regard to race, some scholars have suggested that Hirschi's failure to consider perceived racial discrimination as an important cause of crime may have led to the neglect of race and racial discrimination in the field of criminology as a whole (Unnever et al. 2009).

Although Hirschi's failure to systematically analyze the data for blacks and females in the RYP led to a weaker test of the theory than what might have been, claims that it cannot explain the delinquency of blacks and girls are not well supported with evidence. For example, some have argued that control theory cannot explain the gender gap in delinquency based on Jensen & Eve's (1976) study that left only 2% of the gender gap in delinquency unexplained. Some studies find larger effects of social control variables on delinquency for either boys or girls. For example, Rosenbaum (1987) and Krohn & Massey (1980) found that the effect of attachment on delinquency was stronger for boys but that the amount of explained variance for the social control models as a whole was higher for girls. Alarid et al. (2000) found that the effect of attachment to parents on delinquency was stronger for females than males but that social control variables predict delinquency for both sexes. In a recent analysis of the Richmond data for boys and girls, Nofziger (2019) found that social control measures have a stronger negative effect on delinquency for boys, but that they predict delinquency for both sexes.

Similarly, with regard to race, we are not aware of any evidence suggesting that the predicted relationships between social control measures and delinquency do not hold across racial and ethnic

groups. Unnever et al. (2009) found that perceived racial discrimination is a predictor of delinquency among blacks in the Richmond sample, but they also found significant relationships between social control measures and delinquency among blacks in the sample and did not present comparative analyses for whites. Peguero et al. (2011) found some differences in effect sizes for some elements of the social bond for some racial/ethnic groups, but social control measures predict school misbehavior for blacks, Asian Americans, Latino/as, and whites in their sample. Although Hirschi's failure to analyze the data for blacks in his sample has been criticized, there is no direct evidence that the theory does not predict delinquency among blacks or other minority groups.

Structural Context

In their book *Crime in the Making*, Sampson & Laub (1993) argued that criminologists have largely ignored the link between social structural context and the mediating processes of informal social control. In their view, most researchers have examined either macrolevel/structural variables (e.g., poverty) or microlevel processes (e.g., attachment to parents) in the study of crime. This was largely the case in *Causes* as well. In their age-graded theory of informal social control, Sampson & Laub contended that informal social controls in the family mediated the effects of structural background factors. For example, poverty and disadvantage would affect delinquency through parenting. The effect of structural variables was indirect but nevertheless important. Sampson & Laub (1993, pp. 69–70) thus joined structural and process variables into a single theoretical model of social control.

Testing their theoretical model using data from Glueck & Glueck's (1950) *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study, Sampson & Laub (1993) found strong support for their theory. Specifically, examining a wide range of variables, they showed that structural background factors had little direct effect on delinquency but instead were mediated by the intervening sources of informal social control. Considering the total effect of all structural background factors in their model, 75% was mediated by family processes, namely, supervision, attachment, and discipline (Sampson & Laub 1993). It is thus the case that social control theory can incorporate a focus on social structural context as shown in Sampson & Laub's age-graded theory of informal social control. None of the major tenets of Hirschi's social control theory is challenged by this accommodation.

Justice System Response

In *Causes*, Hirschi did not fully consider whether involvement in the justice system could weaken an individual's bond to society. Over the past two decades, there is a growing body of research examining perceptions of fairness and legitimacy among children and adolescents as the result of involvement in the justice system (see Fagan & Tyler 2005, Tyler et al. 2014). These studies show that neighborhood contexts and interactions with legal actors such as the police shape the outcomes of legal socialization. Specifically, lower ratings of legitimacy of the law and greater legal cynicism are reported when interactions with legal actors such as the police are viewed as unfair and harsh. These results suggest that legal factors play a role in socialization processes that form beliefs in the legitimacy of law and a willingness to be law-abiding (see also Kirk & Papachristos 2011, Sampson & Bartusch 1998).

Similarly, Sampson & Laub (1997) argue that cumulative disadvantage results when involvement with the justice system leads to weakened attachments to family, school, and community. This in turn leads to increased crime. They found that employment is directly influenced by criminal sanctions—incarceration as a juvenile and as a young adult had a negative effect on later job stability, which in turn was negatively related to continued involvement in crime over the life course (Laub & Sampson 1995, 2003; Sampson & Laub 1993).

In *Causes*, Hirschi (1969, p. 201) examined respect for the Richmond police and argued that "lack of respect precedes delinquent acts and does not simply follow from contact with the police." Hirschi (1969, p. 203) elaborated further: "Belief in the moral validity of the law is consistently related to measures of attachment and commitment discussed earlier: the child with little intimate communication with his parents, the child who does not like school, the child who is unconcerned about the opinion of teachers, the child who has little respect for the police, the child who feels little desire for success in conventional terms, is unlikely to feel the demands of law are binding on his conduct."

Nevertheless, we see two possible mechanisms by which justice system involvement can weaken an individual's social bond. The first is a direct effect—involvement in the justice system weakens beliefs in the moral validity of the law, as shown in the research on legitimacy of the law and legal cynicism. The second is an indirect effect—involvement in the justice system weakens social bonds in other domains such as family, school, and community, as shown in research on collateral consequences of justice system involvement (see, e.g., Travis et al. 2014). Building in a feedback loop from justice system involvement back to social bonds in no way challenges the core ideas of social control theory.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE LEGACY OF *CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY*

Successful theories organize the findings of an area, attract the attention of a broad range of researchers and scholars, and provide influential guides to future research as well as public policy. By these standards, Hirschi's theory of social control as depicted in *Causes* has been highly successful. What specific lessons have we learned from *Causes* in the 50 years since its publication?

First, the assumptions upon which theories are based must be consistent with available evidence. Although theorists are of course free to start with any assumptions they like, their theories are unlikely to contribute much if they are at odds with well-established empirical findings. We argue that the failure of Merton's strain theory to stand the test of time was largely the result of his outright rejection of the idea that the desire to commit crime is part of human nature. The untenability of this position is easily revealed by the behavior of the least-socialized members of society, young children. Similarly, Sutherland's and Akers's learning theories of crime have suffered as a result of their assumption of normative relativity, an assumption that is at odds with evidence showing that even those who commit crime generally do not approve of it.

Second, we have learned from Hirschi's findings in *Causes*, along with the findings of subsequent research, that any etiological theory of delinquency or deviance must be consistent with some key empirical patterns to be considered credible. Attachment to parents and school, commitment to long-term goals, and belief in conventional morality are strongly related to delinquency. Logic dictates that attachment to parents in childhood is causally prior to the other variables; thus, it is essential that explanations of delinquency be consistent with this fact.

Furthermore, it is important that researchers consider the interrelated nature of the various elements of the social bond. A narrow focus on one element of the social bond to the exclusion of others cannot be viewed as a true test of social control theory. For example, many scholars have taken the lack of evidence for an association between attachment to friends and delinquency as evidence against social control theory, which overlooks the important fact that attachment to friends is positively related to attachment to parents in virtually all studies that examine that association. Challenges to social control theory must be able to account for this and other patterns of relationships between elements of the social bond.

Third, new theories are likely to have the greatest impact when accompanied by empirical tests of those theories. As others have noted, *Causes* was unique for its time in Hirschi's extensive hypothesis tests using original data. Cullen (2011, p. 300) claims that Hirschi "established the normative standards for what would constitute quality research." In part as a result of Hirschi's work in *Causes*, theories that are presented without empirical tests or without a clear means of operationalizing key concepts tend to fall by the wayside. As a result, *Causes* is recognized for its theoretical, substantive, and methodological contributions to the discipline.

Fourth, tests of theories do not have to use large, nationally representative data sets, nor do they need to use sophisticated or trendy statistical analysis to reveal groundbreaking findings. Arguably, we have learned very little since the publication of *Causes* about the basic relationships Hirschi's cross-tabulation analyses uncovered. Sophisticated statistical models still leave room for debate on causal mechanisms and the meaning of findings and cannot compensate for poor conceptualization or inadequate measurement of key variables. As noted above, small-scale studies of nonrepresentative samples around the world have generally replicated Hirschi's major findings.

Fifth, omissions in statements of theories are not fatal flaws. That Hirschi did not analyze data for girls or blacks in his sample does not mean that the theory cannot explain delinquency among these groups. Hirschi's failure to incorporate a causal role of delinquent peers on delinquency does not mean that the theory cannot incorporate a causal effect of delinquent peers on delinquency. That Hirschi's theory is cross-sectional does not preclude its adaptation to processes that occur over the life course, including social bonds that form in adulthood or experiences with the criminal justice system that may weaken those bonds.

For example, Sampson & Laub's (1993) age-graded theory of informal social control shared Hirschi's focus on adolescence but expanded the perspective to incorporate the reality of later life-course milestones. The age-graded theory emphasizes informal social controls that are manifested in shifting and possibly transformative ways as individuals age. Sampson & Laub focused on parenting styles (supervision, warmth, consistent discipline) and emotional attachment to parents in childhood, school attachment and peer influence in adolescence, and marital stability, military service, and employment in adulthood. They also find considerable empirical support for the continued effects of these variables over the life course. Their theory is explicitly longitudinal both conceptually and in its empirical tests, but it is also clearly a social control theory. Thus, Hirschi's omission in *Causes* provided an opportunity for further theoretical development within the control theory tradition rather than requiring rejection of Hirschi's arguments.

Perhaps the largest testament to the continued impact of *Causes* is, in fact, the criticism it has attracted. It engendered intense reactions, possibly because it violated all the "procedural rules [for] the study of deviant behavior" (Hirschi 1973, p. 159) that seemed to be in effect at the time it was written. It has endured the claim that it led the entire discipline of criminology away from the study of race and crime (Unnever et al. 2009). It is blamed for the lack of progress over 50 years of research on an issue it had little interest in, peer influence on crime (McGloin & Thomas 2019). It has even endured criticism from its own author, who later claimed that it was unable to explain stability in crime and developed an alternative theory he thought better fit the facts of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990). One wonders whether Hirschi had any idea at the time he was writing his dissertation, which was later published as *Causes*, that he would have to endure a 50-year defense of that dissertation conducted by the entire discipline of criminology. We think it is safe to say at this point that he passed.

We think it fitting to give Hirschi the last word regarding the legacy of *Causes*. In the introduction to the reissued edition of *Causes*, Hirschi referred to the fact that "the empirical findings on delinquency fluctuate much less widely than the statements made about them" (Hirschi 1969, p. 243). Hirschi (2002, p. xix) concluded, "All in all, then, *Causes of Delinquency* may stand as a

reasonably balanced account of what we knew at the beginning of the research explosion of the last third of the 20th century – an account not too far from what we know at the end of it."

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