

Self control theory of crime



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Self control theory, also known as General theory of crime is a criminological theory about the lack of an individuals self-control, which is the main factor behind criminal behavior or conformity. Self control theory places much of its emphasis on parental upbringing it suggests that individuals who were ineffectually parented before the age of ten develop less self-control than individuals of roughly the same age who were raised with better parenting, even though others play a vital role in the process of proper or improper socialization (Muraven, Pogarsky and Shmueli 2006). Children with behavioral problems will tend to grow into juvenile delinquents and eventually into adult offenders according to Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990 because the path toward or away from crime commences early in life. If a child has an abusive or neglectful upbringing, he will tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical, risk-taking, short-sighted, and nonverbal, and they will also tend to engage in the criminal acts outlined above (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). Children whose parents care about them and supervise and punish their misconduct will develop the self-control needed, through socialization, to resist the easy temptations offered by crime. This will help them in future school, work, and relationships.

This theory was originally developed by criminologists Travis Hirschi and Michael Gottfredson, but has since been the subject of theoretical debate. Hirschi once focused on social bonds rather than individual and self control as a source for criminality, but his viewed shifted and Gottfredson and Hirschi strayed from Hirschi's previous theory that continuing social bonds cushion against criminal behavior in favor of the proposition that self control, internalized early in life, determines who will be likely to commit crime

(Grasmick, et al. 1993). This theory is more practical, according to Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990 this theory propose that self-control is the general concept around which all of the known facts about crime can be organized. Hirschi's former theory of criminality was a classical theory and according to Brownfield and Sorenson 1993 "classical theory and the concept of self-control are remarkably compatible". Self-control theory is similar to learning theory because learning theory believes that lack of self-control is a basic component or element of the deviant learning process. Even though one learns from the stimuli around them behavior is also the result of something within us, which is self-control.

Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990 define crime as, "acts of force or fraud undertaken in pursuit of self interest". This definition leads to the conclusion that any law violation, including murder, robbery, or property crime, that is done for reasons other than self-interest is not crime and cannot be explained by their theory (Grasmick et al. 1993). Low self-control is supposed to explain an individual's propensity to commit or refrain from committing crimes, just as high self-control explains an individual's likelihood of conforming to social norms and laws (Akers 1991). The authors explain that the concept of self control is not deterministic and that people involved with crime also engage in similar behaviors that provide short-term gratification (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). Smoking, drinking, gambling, irresponsible sex, and speeding in cars are all examples of risky behaviors that may be noticeable in criminal individuals who seek immediate gratification. Six elements of self-control are presented, one of which is that "crimes require little skill or planning (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). Naturally, this is a

source of criticism, since many criminals do plan their deviant acts and have become quite specialized in these activities.

Self-control theory argues that a lack of self-control is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for crime to occur, because other properties of the individual or of the situation may counteract one's likelihood of committing deviant acts (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1993). The theorists have absolutely stated that " their viewpoint, not like many others, is not meant to predict any particular type of activity since most deviant behavior, by its very nature, is impulsive and opportunistic. Therefore, everything else being equal, low self-control and a weak bond to society should positively and significantly predict a variety of deviant and criminal conduct" (Polakowski 1994). Though lack of self-control and the family's role in its failed development do not mean that one will become deviant but it will provide circumstances that will make conditions favorable for delinquency.

Hirschi has written supplemental information regarding the dynamics of the family's important role in reducing delinquency. He says that some aspects of family structure and practice appear to have an impact on delinquency in their own right, over and above their influence on the child's level of self control or socialization. This theory is applied to age, gender, and racial variations in crime, peer groups, schools, and the family, cross-cultural comparisons, white-collar crime, and organized crime. Gottfredson and Hirschi say there are differences among racial and ethnic groups, as there are between the sexes, in levels of direct supervision by the family (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). It is not the gender, race, or age of an individual that directly influences his criminality, but these factors indirectly

affect the amount of socialization by parents. An evaluation of the age-crime relationship, however, has shown that for certain crimes, the variable of age may actually be a direct result of lack of self-control (Greenberg 1994).

Hirschi believes that policies put in place that are designed to deter or rehabilitate offenders are failures, but effective policies that support and enhance the socialization in family would strengthen the family dynamics by improving the quality of family child-rearing practices. Therefore, effective policies would not only focus on preventing teenage pregnancies, but on maintaining a father's involvement with the child's life. Hirschi contends that initiating these public policy reforms would strengthen family bonds, increase socialization, and create greater self-control in the child that will make it unlikely that he will exhibit deviant behavior (Hirschi 1995).

This theory alleges to address all types of crime that Hirschi's first theory in *Causes of Delinquency* did not, but many simply find Gottfredson and Hirschi's definition of crime to be unconvincing. Though studies in general support the theory's major conclusion that low self-control is linked to criminal involvement, they do make some valid points regarding weaknesses inherent in the self-control theory of crime. In *A General Theory of Crime* Gottfredson and Hirschi offer no general or specific empirical test of the theory (Akers 1991). This makes their claims seem grandiose, though the major view appears to be true. The theory has also been accused of being tautological, because they do not define self-control separately from the propensity to commit crimes and analogous behavior (Akers 1991). They use the term criminality and self-control synonymously, which is like saying low self control causes low self-control, or criminality causes criminality. Critics

have suggested that an independent indicator of self-control is necessary to truly define self-control. It has also been suggested by critics that this theory wrongfully claims other theories are unimportant (Akers 1991). Counter-intuitive to the logic of self-control theory, a longitudinal study was conducted showing that adult social bonds, like stable employment and cohesive marriages for example, can redirect offenders into a lifestyle of conformity beyond the childhood years of socialization. Studies have also shown that the relationship among self-control, crime, and analogous behaviors was also questionable.

Overall, it seems that this theory carries heavy paternalistic undertones and the key to developing self-control is proper socialization, especially in childhood. Gottfredson and Hirschi find the traditional role of women and men to be crucial to the development of children. They seem to feel that if society could regain traditional American values with the woman staying at home, the husband working during the day, and the children disciplined by both parents, criminality would decrease. They do not even consider the outcomes of single-parent, divorced or un-wed parents, but they are a reality in contemporary society. In summary, Travis Hirschi has had a significant impact on the world of criminology. His two major theories, the control theory of delinquency and self-control theory, despite criticism have guided public policy reformations, and are quite popular today.

Akers, Ronald L. " Self-control as a general theory of crime." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 1991: 201-211.

Brownfield, David, and Ann Marie Sorenson. " Self-control and juvenile delinquency: theoretical issues and an empirical assessment of selected elements of a general theory of crime." *Deviant Behavior*, 1993: 243-264.

Gottfredson, Michael R., and Travis Hirschi. *A General Theory of Crime*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Grasmick, Harold G., Charles R Tittle, Jr., Robert J Bursik, and Bruce J Arneklev. " Testing the core empirical implications of Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 1993: 5-29.

Hirschi, Travis, and Michael Gottfredson. " Commentary: Testing the General Theory of Crime." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 1993: 47-54.

Muraven, Mark, Greg Pogarsky, and Dikla Shmueli. " Self-control Depletion and the General Theory of Crime." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 2006: 263-277.

Polakowski, Michael. " Linking self-and social control with deviance: illuminating the structure underlying a General Theory of Crime and its relation to deviant activity." *Journal of Quantative Criminology*, 1994: 41-79.