

Self-Control Pathology: The Elephant in the Living Room

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It would be an overstatement to say "once a criminal always a criminal," but it would be closer to the truth than to deny the evidence of a unifying and long-enduring pattern of encounters with the law for the most serious offenders. Richard Herrnstein (1995: 41)

"The elephant in the living room" is a cliché whereby people avoid discussing uncomfortable issues that plague them. No matter how evident this problem, it is tactfully avoided. It might seem strange to use this cliché given the attention accorded to self-control theory, indeed, dozens of scholars have studied it. While the bulk of the scholarly attention to self-control theory has been supportive (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1993, 2000), others (e.g., Akers, 1991; Barlow, 1991; Geis, 2000) have grave concerns about purported deficiencies of the theory. These include that it is tautological and therefore ridden with fatal error, that it is no better than competing theories (e.g., social learning and differential association), that it explains little variation in crime, and that it is rife with alleged methodological problems which, not coincidentally, are the outcome of a scrutiny to which other theories are not subjected. Unfortunately, these concerns are academic red herrings that avoid the potentially more interesting and relevant aspects of self-control theory. Namely, self-control theory hits the bulls-eye. Other scholars do not want to admit this. In grand and yet cogent form, the theory parsimoniously matches the empirical reality of crime. Still, important things about self-control have remained unsaid.

The current thesis is that self-control is homologous to psychopathy and that the socialization processes that fail to instill self-control are analogous

to sociopathy. The interconnectedness between these constructs underscores five criminological truisms. First, the family is the fundamental socialization agent and is most responsible for inculcating pro-social and antisocial values, beliefs, and behaviors. Consequently, familial dysfunction is the most profound criminogenic force. Second, the individual-level is the appropriate unit of analysis for studying crime. Sociological root causes are spurious because they are self-selected by individuals. Third, the stability and omnibus generality of self-control and psychopathy explain criminal versatility and other negative life outcomes for criminal offenders. Fourth, the criminal justice system, because of its delayed application, is generally unable to mollify criminal behavior, evidenced by the failure of most offenders. Fifth, the essence of self-control, psychopathy, and sociopathy reflect the Hobbesian assumptions of human nature that underwrite control theories. Each proposition accentuates the unquestionably negative nature of force and fraud and the individuals who commit such acts. This undeniably grim information forecasts the continued inability of society and the criminal justice system to appropriately control crime.¹

The Salience of the Family

Everybody knows that the family has an enormous impact on criminal behavior. Common sense and the nightly news convey that it is no coincidence that the preponderance of chronic offenders and persons who commit atrocious criminal acts were often themselves the victims of considerable abuses at the hands of their own family. Based on the same logic, it is understood that caring, diligent, loving, responsible, righteous parents generally do not produce children who are prone to engage in generalized problematic behavior. Toward this end, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 97) have acknowledged the "belief of the general public (and those who deal with offenders in the criminal justice system) that 'defective upbringing' or 'neglect' in the home is the primary cause of crime."

Childhood abuse, neglect, maltreatment, and the like have been linked to an assortment of problems including juvenile delinquency, antisocial personality, substance abuse, mental illness, poor self-image, alcoholism, and chronic criminality (Glueck and Glueck, 1930; Hirschi, 1994, 1995; Levy, 1942; McCord, 1979; Moffitt, 1990, 1993; Muller, Lemieux, and Sicoli, 2001; Widom, 1989). Haapasalo and Pokela (1999) reviewed several longitudinal studies of delinquency including the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study, Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, Christchurch Health and Development Study, Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, and the Oregon Youth Study. They consistently found that chronic adult criminals had experienced harsh, punitive, overly lax, and neglectful parenting; had been significantly more likely to be rejected by their parents;

and had suffered child abuse victimization. These findings were mirrored by data from the Pittsburgh Youth Study (Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2001) and Rochester Youth Development Study (Thornberry, Ireland, and Smith, 2001). Family violence begets many problems.

Self-control theory is palatable to sociologists because of its focus on family socialization processes in causing problem behaviors. Effective parents are caregivers who monitor the child's behavior, recognize deviant behavior when it occurs, and punish such behavior. These socialization processes differentially produce self-control by age eight.² Parental attachment to the child, parental criminality, family size, and the single-parent family differentially constitute effective parenting and affect delinquency. For example, Farrington (2000) found that children at age ten who experienced adverse child-rearing, and had many siblings, convicted parents, family disruption, and young mothers were significantly more likely to be antisocial at age thirty-two. Similarly, McCord (1979) examined the family backgrounds of 201 men reared in the 1930s and 1940s. Studying their criminal records thirty years later, she found that home atmosphere was a significant antecedent of adult crime. Both lend retrospective support to the prospective claims of self-control theory.

Since the family is the primary arena of socialization it is the most significant determinant of an individual's life chances. Consequently, one of the most pivotal contributions of self-control theory is the explicit discussion of the role that abject parenting plays in producing criminal and largely unsuccessful persons (see Cochran et al., 1998; Gibbs, Giever, and Martin, 1998; Hay, 2001; Polakowski, 1994). This has enormous implications for criminological theory. What self-control theory says is that *one's own parents are most responsible* for consigning them to a life of failure. Moreover, the socialization processes instilling self-control occur so early in life (before the child has any real sense of agency) and are so profound, that they are ostensibly ontogenetic processes. This makes the causes of self-control and self-control itself largely intractable. Consider prenatal care as an example. Taking prenatal vitamins; consulting with doctors; getting sufficient sleep; eating a balanced diet; and avoiding stress, excessive physical exertion, smoking, alcohol, and substance use are just some of the things that an expectant mother can do to produce a healthy environment for her child. After birth, parents engage in an array of behaviors with significant consequences for their child (see Hirschi, 1995: 135; Moffitt, 1990).

The socialization processes that engender low self-control are more disturbing than Gottfredson and Hirschi theorize because they are in effect producing sociopathic children, the feral products of indifferent, incompetent, or overburdened parents (Lykken, 1995: xviii). Failing to effectively teach and monitor children has implications far more serious than simply producing youngsters who are unable to appreciate long-term tasks. Abject parenting

promotes hyperactivity, fidgetiness, outbursts, and having a short-temper—all are simple examples of choosing “me” and “now” over “others” and “later.” Teachers frequently describe such children as cheating, crafty, cruel, disobedient, impudent, lying, boredom-prone, and rude (McCord, 2000). These qualities pose life-long problems. Herpertz and Sass (2000) have suggested that severe familial difficulty helps engender the emotional deficiencies demonstrated by psychopaths. Specifically, children with poor conditioning fail to appreciate the consequences of their actions leading to a deficit of avoidance behavior. This emotional detachment compromises the child’s ability to experience feelings such as guilt, which can inhibit violent impulses. Additionally, their emotional void contributes to under-arousal or chronic boredom, leading to the need for sensation seeking.

In sum, the parenting styles implicated by self-control theory are fertile ground for the production of sociopathy. Knowing this, it is difficult to imagine a more criminogenic environment than a home governed by abusive, ambivalent, indifferent, lazy, and selfish parent(s). Childhood problems such as inattentiveness in school, irritability, aggressiveness, hyperactivity, impulsiveness, and possessing a generally rancorous disposition are the likely outcomes of this environment, traits that are the harbinger of juvenile delinquency, adult criminality, and personal malaise (Loeber, 1987; Loeber and Farrington, 1998; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996; Robins, 1966). Once established, these traits are rarely undone, making dysfunctional family socialization the most destructive crime-causing force in contemporary society.³

Individuals, Self-Selection, and Crime

The following anecdote is useful when introducing students to self-control theory. Imagine that a female loved-one (e.g., daughter, sister, or mother) has brought home her fiancé. While the fiancé is in the other room, your loved-one briefly describes his personality and lifestyle. He is sporadically employed and generally stays at a job for only one to three months. While he has no official vocational training, he prefers work in the areas of construction and landscaping. He frequently quits or is fired because of disagreements with coworkers and supervisors. Indeed, it is often the case that the fiancé has a clear vision of how to improve the company, but meddling and conspiring bosses always get in the way. He recurrently collects unemployment benefits because he chooses to avoid underemployment. For the record, the fiancé, who described school as “not his thing,” did manage to graduate high school, but found his two months in college unrewarding and quit.

Socially, the fiancé enjoys going to bars and is an enthusiastic drinker. He also smokes cigarettes, dabbles recreationally with illicit drugs (when they are provided by his friends), prefers to eat at fast-food restaurants rather than

cook at home, and does not exercise. He is frequently bored and annoyed by others’ expectations of him. The fiancé is friendly and only abusive, sullen, or irritable when intoxicated or when “things are not going his way.” He has been “common-law married” twice and briefly engaged once before, but your loved-one is confident that their impending relationship is “the one.”

Students find this exercise darkly humorous and, unfortunately, can immediately envision someone in their own lives who fits the profile. This resonance is the main allure of self-control theory, which suggests that multifaceted behaviors and life outcomes are primarily the consequences of an interpersonal deficiency that coalesces in certain individuals. For example, Evans and his colleagues (1997: 490–91) found that self-control was related in the expected direction to “quality of family relationships, attachment to church, having criminal associates and values, educational attainment and occupational status, and residing in a neighborhood perceived to be disorderly. Self-control is also significantly related to quality of friendships and the analogous behavior measure is negatively related to marriage and positively related to nights out.” DeLisi (2001a: 7) assessed that persons with low self-control “compromise their life chances by constantly living in the now and abjuring long-term benefits, are wholly self-absorbed and unconcerned with the welfare of others, are more likely to abuse alcohol and illicit drugs, and are generally hot-tempered.” Hirschi and Gottfredson (1994: 261) noticed that “throughout the twentieth century, evidence has accumulated that people who tend to lie, cheat, and steal also tend to hit other people; that the same people tend to drink, smoke, use drugs, wreck cars, desert their spouses, quit their jobs, and come late to class.”

In other words, lightning continually strikes persons who lack self-control. It is perhaps the only criminological theory that can realistically explain the profound failure that continually characterizes the lives of criminal offenders. It is not simply coincidence that criminal offenders (or the fiancé in the current example) are such profound losers. This brute reality is guaranteed to roil others in the academic community. For example, Evans and his colleagues (1997: 495) concluded that, “The general theory is a controversial perspective that many criminologists may, for ideological reasons, prefer to be proven false. Its emphasis on enduring individual differences and its disdain for social causation are out of step with the ways of thinking about crime now dominant in the discipline.”

Abusive, neglectful, criminal, or simply lackadaisical parenting fails children long before that child can associate with delinquent peers, be labeled at school, be profiled by the police, feel strain, or decide to embrace a putative subculture. The damage is done early, and the individual selects most processes occurring afterward. It is this realization and the protean implications of it that constitute the “general” in *A General Theory of Crime*. This is a major concern since other theoretically relevant variables often claim credit

for self-control. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 167–68) have suggested, “It is hard to overstate the magnitude of this problem in criminology because of the tendency of people with low self-control to avoid attachment to or involvement in all social institutions—a tendency that produces a negative correlation between institutional experience and delinquency. This gives all institutions credit for negative effects on crime, credit they may not deserve.”⁴

The problem with sociological root causes (e.g., poverty, minority status, discrimination, social inequality, neighborhood disorganization, socioeconomic strain) is that they most commonly typify persons *not involved in crime*. The majority, to use the aforementioned examples, of the impoverished, minority, discriminated against, have-nots, dwellers of disorganized neighborhoods, and strained individuals are not criminals. Conversely, individuals who lack self-control routinely demonstrate some involvement in problem behaviors. From this vantage, the social context is largely incidental since poorly controlled persons will find a way to manifest their individual-level deficiency. The same can be said of psychopaths who continually and volitionally injure others and engage in criminal conduct. They are what Robins and O’Neal (1958: 170) described as “a relatively circumscribed segment of the population distinguished by a life-long failure to conform to the social mores . . . it seems probable that [their] criminal activities are more frequently only one expression of a grossly disturbed life pattern of which transiency, violence, and unstable family relations, as well as crime, are typical.” Individuals matter. Self-control theory and the psychopathy literature make this perfectly clear, especially given the staggering per capita human, social, and criminal costs of the worst offenders.

Versatility/Generality

Part and parcel of the consistently disadvantaged situations that persons with low self-control place themselves in is the idea of criminal versatility or generality. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) purport that self-control is a stable, enduring tendency (akin to criminal propensity) that manifests in different expressions of behavior depending on social circumstances. These behaviors are quick and relatively easy ways to satisfy some immediate desire, whether normative or criminal. They include sleeping through the morning alarm, cutting in line, choosing to skip appointments, silencing an annoying person, in short, following one’s id. There is no rhyme or reason to the nature of the offense committed. Persons simply choose to commit violent, property, white-collar, nuisance, drug, or victimless crimes depending on their mood and immediate wants, the presence of suitable victims or objects of desire, the likelihood of easy gain, and the absence of police or other sanctioning agents. Consequently, aggravated assault, burglary, embezzlement, disorderly con-

duct, marijuana smoking, and prostitution are similar because they are borne from the same animus.

The stability and versatile manifestations of self-control are reconcilable with the general offending habits of criminal offenders. This is contrary to the idea of offense specialization which posits that criminals near-obsessively engage in specific types of crimes as if to satisfy some fixation. A popular example of this specialized offender is the serial killer, the seemingly functioning person by day who over time preys on other people and kills them. A cursory examination of the rap sheets of serial killers, however, reveals that they engage in an assortment of criminal acts in concert with the actual killing. These include abduction or kidnapping, rape, robbery, auto theft, theft, and drug use. Empirical research consistently supports the idea of criminal versatility (Britt, 1994; DeLisi, 2001c; Herrnstein, 1995; Hindelang, 1971; Hirschi, 1969; Loeber and Farrington, 1998; Simon, 2000; Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin, 1972), particularly among psychopaths (Black and Larson, 1999; Glueck and Glueck, 1943: 64/120, 1950: 239–40; Hare, 1993, 1996; Hare, McPherson, and Forth, 1988; Harris, Rice, and Cormier, 1991; Harris, Skilling, and Rice, 2001; Hart, Kropp, and Hare, 1988; Hemphill et al., 1998; Lykken, 1995).

A careful reading of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990: 91–94) discussion of the manifestations of self-control also reveals the isomorphism between their construct and psychopathy.⁵ Particularly telling is the passage they cite from Harrison Gough’s (1948: 362) early sociological investigation of psychopathy:

Unconcern over the rights and privileges of others when recognizing them would interfere with personal satisfaction in any way; impulsive behavior . . . ; inability to form deep or persistent attachments to other persons or to identify in interpersonal relationships; poor judgment and planning in attaining defined goals; apparent lack of anxiety and distress over social maladjustment . . . ; a tendency to project blame onto others and to take no responsibility for failures . . . ; almost complete lack of dependability and unwillingness to assume responsibility; and, finally, emotional poverty.

The diagnostic overlap between psychopathy and self-control is alarming, and both constructs denote a generally problematic disposition that does not lead to happy endings. For example, Cleckley’s (1941) seminal criteria included items such as failure to follow any life plan, unresponsiveness in relationships, pathological egocentricity and incapacity for love, poor judgment, and lack of remorse or shame, insincerity, and unreliability. This profile was ultimately reformulated by Robert Hare (1991, 1993, 1996), whose Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) is the definitive measure of psychopathy. The PCL-R is a twenty-item index comprising two types of factors, interpersonal/affective and socially deviant lifestyle. The interpersonal/af-

fective factors includes glibness/superficial charm, grandiose sense of self-worth, pathological lying, conning/manipulative, lack of guilt or remorse, shallow affect, callousness/lack of empathy, and failure to accept responsibility for one's actions. The socially deviant lifestyle factor includes proneness to boredom/need for stimulation, parasitic lifestyle, poor behavioral controls, sexual promiscuity, impulsivity, irresponsibility, lack of realistic long-term goals, early onset of problems, marital problems, juvenile delinquency, noncompliance with the criminal justice system, and *criminal versatility*.

In other words, psychopaths and persons lacking self-control will, by definition, serve themselves at the expense of others regardless of the context. Criminal versatility enhances the idea that the ultimate driving force of crime lies within the individual, making the claims of individual pathology approaches like self-control and psychopathy more believable. Mendacious claims with social psychological approaches (e.g., social learning) simply cannot compete with the consistency posed by individual-level defects.

Criminal Justice: Too Little, Too Late

Gottfredson and Hirschi are less than enthusiastic about the ability of the state to deter or control crime. In their words (1990: 269), "Given the ineffectiveness of natural learning environments in teaching self-control, we would not expect the artificial environments available to the criminal justice system to have much impact." Indeed, self-control theory anticipates criminal justice systems' failure to correct delinquent behavior for two reasons. First, the invariant effect of age on crime (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983) posits that offenders will cease and desist from offending as they pass through the crime-prone years during adolescence and early adulthood. Particularly for the purpose of deterrence, sanctions are largely redundant if individuals will quit crime on their own. Furthermore, based on the logic of the invariant age-crime curve, selective incapacitation efforts are futile because they constitute warehousing persons, even high-rate offenders, whose criminal offending careers are undeniably on the wane (see LeBlanc, 1997).

Second, the etiology of self-control occurs in early childhood. Once established, it remains a stable individual characteristic for life. In fact, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 108) suggest, "The stability of criminality is a staple of pragmatic criminology." This means that once engendered, low self-control cannot be undone (Arneklev, Cochran, and Gainey, 1998). The inexorable nature of low self-control is reconcilable with the failure of criminal justice policy to effectively reduce recidivism. Concepts such as correction and rehabilitation literally mean to restore to a prior state or condition of health, functioning, or capacity. To be corrected, an individual must have been functioning in the first place. Theoretically, the purpose of sanctions is to compel the deviant to relinquish their deviance and recommit to conformity. But,

what if they have never conformed? Can individuals learn to do something (e.g., behave) that was precluded by their socialization experiences? Persons who have never had a caregiver in their life are, simply, "designed to fail" (DeLisi, 2001b). Well-meaning social scientists, judicious probation officers, earnest mental health counselors, firm but supportive parole officers, or liberal judges cannot realistically rectify these voids.

The application of self-control to criminal justice system issues is in its infancy, but already the empirical evidence of self-control's detrimental effects is daunting. Just as self-control has been found to be predictive of crime in student or community samples (review Pratt and Cullen, 2000), it is also inversely related to acts of force and fraud among high-risk offender samples (DeLisi, 2001a, 2001b; Longshore, 1998; Longshore and Turner, 1998; Longshore, Turner, and Stein, 1996). Moreover, low self-control is helpful in explaining why many offenders do not successfully comply with criminal justice system agents. For example, DeLisi (2001a) suggested that the use of aliases and alternative/fraudulent dates of birth, places of birth, and social security numbers should be used to behaviorally operationalize self-control since attempting to deceive the police is risky, shortsighted, impulsive, and irresponsible. Empirically, offenders who employ numerous aliases and other forms of deception were significantly more involved in violent, property, white-collar, and nuisance offending than persons with greater self-control. Also, offenders who used multiple fraudulent identifiers also tended to miss court appearances, violate probationary and parole sentences, escaped, and were more frequently convicted of felonies and sentenced to prison (DeLisi, 2001b).

Low self-control might explain why only a fraction of persons who engage in illegal behavior are actually arrested. Perhaps impulsivity (e.g., frequenting bars, going out at night, driving after drinking alcohol) differentiates arrestees from secret deviants, or perhaps the lackluster personality traits (e.g., hot-tempered demeanor) of persons with low self-control mobilizes police attention. Self-control might prove helpful in explaining why many defendants prefer the relatively immediate results of a plea agreement rather than endure a trial, are unable or unwilling to abide by bond conditions such as sobriety, or generally have difficulty with the responsibilities posed by community corrections. Within the parameters of self-control theory, it is clear why the criminal justice system is largely ineffectual: It is applied far too late in life to benefit the criminal defendants it is designed to correct.

Unfortunately, "too little, too late" might be optimistic if the pathology posed by self-control approaches the criminal justice track record of psychopathic offenders. Psychopaths, by their very nature are not amenable to treatment or correction, thus their recidivism is a certainty (Black and Larson, 1999; Cleckley, 1941; Hare, 1993; Harris, Skilling, and Rice, 2001; Lykken, 1995; Robins, 1966). Reid and Gacono (2000: 648) have expressed the reason for this "therapeutic nihilism:"

Psychopaths feel pain, but it is temporary and poorly remembered after it is gone. They may feel anxiety associated with immediate danger, but their anticipation of danger is more often a stimulation and not particularly uncomfortable. Getting caught and punished for a crime is to be avoided, but the combination of the low probability of being caught and the even lower probability of being punished makes the stimulation of antisocial behavior easily worth the gamble. In fact, the "gamble" itself, within a personality structure characterized by proneness to boredom, makes the antisocial behavior itself appealing.

It is not difficult to superimpose this passage into the logic of *A General Theory of Crime*. The idea that poorly controlled offenders will ever turn it around is a liberal will-'o-the-wisp, and a compelling reason why the criminal justice system is primarily in the business of warehousing and incapacitating rather than rehabilitating and treating.

Hobbes and Crime

Most theories of delinquency offer explanations about the mechanisms by which individuals are propelled toward committing crime. The core assumption inherent to these theories is that actors are generally good and therefore not predisposed to commit bad acts. Environments or social conditions on the other hand are potentially bad if for no other reason than they may entice normally good persons to do bad things. These extra-individual phenomena include poverty, unfair labeling, discrimination, strain, and associating with people who already commit delinquent acts. Control theories are diametrically different. They assume that people are simply self-interested and therefore not concerned with the feelings of others or the community. In short, control theory posits a more cynical and mean view of human nature in which maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain are the "sovereign masters" of man. Crime, then, is a priori expected. The task at hand for criminologists of this orientation is to explain why people do not engage in crime: What situations or phenomena cause them to resist their natural impulses and behave?

Control theory is squarely in the classical tradition, specifically the thought of Thomas Hobbes. Writing in the seventeenth century, Hobbes held a rather pessimistic view of human beings. Man was framed as a competitive, quarrelsome, diffident creature in search of glory who was not adverse to "use violence to make themselves master of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle" (Hobbes, 1987[1651]: 64-65). This profile was characteristic of all persons, not just wrongdoers; therefore human nature itself was unutterably bad. Hobbes' famous proclamation is that the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Because of his intrinsic hate, lust, ambition, and covetousness, man must somehow be kept in line to avoid a degenerative "war of all against all." The sanctioning mechanism is the state or *Leviathan* and its necessary institu-

tions including law and criminal justice. According to Hobbes (1987[1651]: 158), "of all the passions that which inclines man least to break the laws is fear. Nay, excepting some generous nature, it is the only thing (when there is appearance of profit, or pleasure by breaking the laws) that makes men keep them." Therefore, it is the state's function to strike fear and impose penalty since self-sanctioning will not naturally occur.

The way to ward off such disagreeable tendencies is for parents or caregivers to effectively socialize their children. This entails investing in children, instilling pro-social beliefs and values, and closely monitoring children to recognize and adjust their aberrant behavior. Fundamentally, this teaches children that there is more to life than the hasty and immediate gratification of one's desires, that some desirable outcomes take longer to achieve, that verbal articulation rather than a physical tantrum or primal scream is a more civilized way of handling discomfort, and that other people matter and are worthy of consideration. Ineffective parenting will have difficulty surmounting the feral tendencies described by Hobbes. Furthermore, it makes sense that children who are neglected, beaten, malnourished, abandoned, bartered for some other commodity, kept in a closet, or subjected to continual victimization will not thrive.

Gottfredson and Hirschi spend an entire chapter describing the logical structure of crime as self-serving acts of force and fraud that "provide benefits with similar qualities such as immediacy, brevity of obligation, and effortlessness" (1990: 21). They do not, however, provide discussion about the moral and social nature of crime and thus do not go far enough in linking the characteristics of criminal acts to the character of persons with low self-control. Force and fraud are not simply physical and immediate means to achieving self-serving ends; force and fraud are negative, bad, mean-spirited, and misanthropic. In other words, self-control, pathological offenders, and the moral and social nature of crime are textbook Hobbes.

Crimes are unquestionably bad things. This simple point is lost by media reports that bombard weary residents, criminal justice practitioners who cannot afford to be weighted down by the endlessly depressing nature of their job, and criminologists immersed in generally arcane research. Yet, the commission of crime and the resulting victimization purely reflect the malicious drama characterized by Hobbes. The loss and pain that result from murder are incalculable as are the physical and emotional distress, embarrassment, shame, and anger felt by rape victims. Armed robbery is a visceral gun-in-the-face in which perpetrators use the threat of lethal force to obtain usually scant amounts of money. The common victim of armed robbery is the person whose unfortunate circumstance was showing up for work at a gas station, convenience store, or bank. Aggravated assault is an attack in which serious bodily injury is incurred, such as shooting, stabbing, bludgeoning, or stomping another person.

Burglary victims must live with the knowledge that an unwanted person has occupied the intimate confines of their home. Theft, the universal crime, is loss of something of value, taken by someone else who wanted it. Auto theft is this to a greater degree, although given our reliance on automobiles in the United States, losing one's car has several unfortunate implications. Forgery commits an absolute mess for the victim whose checkbook was used. Disorderly conduct, public intoxication, and vagrancy frighten citizens and expose onlookers to drunken, disrespectful behavior. The list of deviance and the devastation wrought is endless: price-fixing, infidelity, substance abuse, domestic violence, extortion, prostitution, child abuse, ethnic intimidation, tax evasion, pimping, etc. Crime is serious business that creates pain, instills fear, ruins life chances, contributes to balkanization, devalues communities, and necessitates ugly state intervention. This is Hobbes' script.

Criminals are morally and socially reprehensible. This realization is devastating to those intent on lionizing offenders and absolving their individual-level flaws. Indeed, after a decade of empirical research, could one come to the conclusion that persons with low self-control (read criminals) are not flawed? Self-control is facilitative of failure in traffic (Junger and Tremblay, 1999; Keane, Maxim, and Teevan, 1993), school (Cochran et al., 1998; Gibbs and Giever, 1995; cf. Tibbetts and Myers, 1999), work (Gibson and Wright, 2001), family (Evans et al., 1997; Gibson, Wright, and Tibbetts, 2000), dating (Sellers, 1999), and complying with the criminal justice system (DeLisi, 2001b). Moreover, drinking alcohol; substance abuse; smoking; gambling; violent, property, white-collar, and nuisance offending; and being victimized are significantly more likely for persons with low self-control (Arneklev et al., 1993; Brownfield and Sorenson, 1993; DeLisi, 2001a; Gibbs, Giever, and Martin, 1998; Piquero and Tibbetts, 1996; Schreck, 1999; Sorenson and Brownfield, 1995).

Thirty years ago, Hirschi (1973) published a wry, reflexive article about the ideological games that criminologists play and how these dogmatic procedural rules often fly in the face of empirical reality (also see Gottfredson and Hindelang, 1980). Self-control theory has raised the ire of criminologists because it proudly violates these rules (e.g., avoids "kinds-of-people" theory and the "evil causes evil fallacy"). But unfortunately, both of these are grimly true. A multitude of problems are likely for persons with low self-control, and their dysfunction is the outcome of an earlier one, abject parenting. Taken together, self-control evokes the messages of Hobbes: People are bad creatures who do bad things to one another. Indeed, this message is the moral undercurrent of crime.

Conclusion

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: xiii) were motivated to create self-control theory because they were "unhappy with the ability of academic criminology

to provide believable explanations of criminal behavior." What they sought was a theory complete with the "ring of truth." They have succeeded. The empirical support of self-control theory is all the more surprising since so many scholars have been sniping at it. These claims of refutation are the usual academic fare: alternative and better theories, concerns over conceptualization, measurement, model specification, tautology, applicability to "diverse" subjects, and so on.

What has not, until now, been adequately discussed are the linkages between self-control and pathological conditions like psychopathy and sociopathy. These are frighteningly real phenomena that are significantly engendered by familial dysfunction and parents unwilling or unable to sensibly rear their children. The products are selfish, mean-spirited, socially lacking children who will grow to fail in all arenas of life. This failure rears its ugly head regardless of context. Pathologies like self-control lend themselves to disparate criminal and analogously negative behaviors and constitute tremendous human, social, and fiscal costs. Furthermore, the early-life etiology of self-control makes it a largely intractable problem that renders the criminal justice system powerless. Until the pernicious problems that plague the American family are genuinely addressed, pathology will flourish, and the painful relevance of self-control theory will remain all too clear.

Notes

1. Psychopathy, sociopathy, antisocial personality disorder, and low self-control are similar phenomena. However, they are not the same. The former three constructs in particular are often and incorrectly used interchangeably. Briefly, psychopathy is a personality disorder defined by a distinctive cluster of behaviors and inferred personality traits, most of which society views as pejorative (Hare, 1993: ix). It is a lifelong condition found in approximately 5 percent of males. Psychopaths are conscienceless predators whom, it has been estimated, commit over 50 percent of the violent crime in the United States. The etiology of psychopathy is not completely known, however strong evidence suggests that it is partially but substantially heritable. Sociopathy is prototypically akin to psychopathy, however its etiology is social. Abusive, abject, or abysmal parenting like those implicated by self-control theory produces sociopaths. Antisocial personality disorder is a diagnosis used by the American Psychiatric Association and published in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)*. A "pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others occurring since age 15" and three or more psychopathic-like personality traits are needed to meet a diagnosis of ASPD. ASPD is much more common than psychopathy; 90 percent of psychopaths meet the criteria for ASPD, but only 30 percent of the latter meet the guidelines for psychopathy (Shibley and Arrigo, 2001: 409). For a look at the history of these related concepts, see (Arrigo and Shibley, 2001; Hare, 1993; Harris, Skilling, and Rice, 2001; Lykken, 1995; Shibley and Arrigo, 2001).
2. Self-control is actually developmental, not static as is generally and incorrectly expressed in the literature (for an exception, see Sampson and Laub, 2001: 247).

3. Cochran and his colleagues (1998: 247) found mixed empirical support for self-control theory. They admonished that "it appears that other factors beyond effective parenting may also play a role in the development of self-control." They are probably correct in their assessment; however this is not necessarily a damaging criticism of the theory. Indeed, it is probable that children who demonstrate psychopathy are very difficult to govern and thereby compromise the ability of parents to instill self-control. The idea that children can demonstrate psychopathy has been supported empirically (Edens et al., 2001; Farrington, 2000; Harris, Skilling, and Rice, 2001; Lynam, 1996).
4. Wilson and Herrnstein (1985: 42) are aligned with this line of reasoning: "Whatever factors contribute to crime . . . they must all affect the behavior of individuals if they are to affect crime. If people differ in their tendency to commit crime, we must express those differences in terms of how some array of factors affects their individual decisions."
5. In addition to the influence of Gough's (1948) work, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) also heavily reference Lee Robins' (1966) research on sociopathy. The interest in psychopathy is also evident in Hirschi's (1969: 17-18, 24) *Causes of Delinquency*.

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