

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
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SUBJECT: *Research in Review*

TO: Executive Staff
 Superintendents
 Other Readers



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Enclosed please find Volume 10, Number 2 of *Research in Review* (RIR). This issue presents a series of reviews dealing with various topics including a report from the non-profit group The Sentencing Project on recent developments and reforms in state sentencing policies, an evaluation of cultural responsivity in batterers counseling programs and a special section on the relationship between self-control and offender behavior, which has been one major focus of criminological theory over the past decade or so.

The first two reviews were prepared by Jesse Zortman and Lisa Wingard, respectively. Both Jesse and Lisa have recently joined the staff of the Bureau of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants as Research and Evaluation Analysts, having completed the year-long Pennsylvania Management Associate program in June. We look forward to their ongoing contributions to RIR.

Upcoming issues of Volume 10 will continue to present findings from the Department's ongoing study of parole violators and parole successes. RIR will also continue with article reviews and briefing papers on topics relevant to corrections, as well as discussing findings from PADOC evaluation studies as they are completed.

As always, we welcome your feedback on RIR. We also welcome your suggestions for specific topical areas for future issues. While we cannot promise that we can produce an issue in response to all suggestions offered, we are very much interested in knowing what questions and topics are most interesting to our readers.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in *Research in Review*.

Research in Review

Bureau of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants

Editors: Gary Zajac and Kristofer Bret Bucklen (717)214-8959

Summary and Major Findings of Articles Reviewed

Ryan S. King. 2007. *Changing Direction? State Sentencing Reforms 2004-2006*. Page 3
Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

This new report from the Washington-based research and policy non-profit organization – The Sentencing Project – highlights recent changes in state sentencing policies nationwide and the impact they may have on prison populations. While at least 22 states have enacted policy changes directed towards alternatives to incarceration for lower level offenders, other sentencing changes may contribute to upward pressures on prison populations.

Edward W. Gondolf. 2007. “Culturally-Focused Batterer Counseling for African-American Men.” *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6(2), 341-366. Page 4

Researchers studied the effects of culturally-focused batterer counseling on the re-arrest and re-assault rates of 503 African American domestic violence offenders in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This initial study revealed that culturally-focused batterer counseling was not more effective than conventional batterer counseling for an all African American or a racially mixed group.

Special Section on Self Control Theory and Offender Behavior Page 6

One of the most important recent developments in criminological theory is Gottfredson and Hirschi’s low self-control theory. The theory has generated considerable controversy yet some of its components have been well-validated. Policy implications of the theory are important for criminal justice professions to consider. This special section includes an outline of the major components of the theory, a discussion of the points of contention as well as the overall empirical status, a number of brief reviews of recent tests of the theory, and a summary of the policy implications proceeding from the theory. Summarized pieces include:

Charles Tittle and Ekaterina Botchkovar. 2005. “Self-Control, Criminal Motivation and Deterrence: An Investigation Using Russian Respondents.” *Criminology*, 43(2), 307-354.

John Paul Wright and Kevin Beaver. 2005. “Do Parents Matter in Creating Self-Control in Their Children? A Genetically Informed Test of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s Theory of Low Self-Control.” *Criminology*, 43(4), 1169-1202.

Constance Chapple. 2005. “Self-Control, Peer Relations, and Delinquency.” *Justice Quarterly*, 22(1), 89-106.

Lorraine Latimore, Charles Tittle, and Harold Grasmick. 2006. “Childrearing, Self-Control, and Crime: Additional Evidence.” *Sociological Inquiry*, 76(3), 343-371.

Callie Burt, Ronald Simons, and Leslie Simons. 2006. "A Longitudinal Test of the Effects of Parenting and the Stability of Self-Control: Negative Evidence for the General Theory of Crime." *Criminology*, 44(2), 353-396.

Carter Hay and Walter Forrest. 2006. "The Development of Self-Control: Examining Self-Control Theory's Stability Thesis." *Criminology*, 44(4), 739-774.

Elaine Doherty. 2006. "Self-Control, Social Bonds, and Desistance: A Test of Life-Course Interdependence." 2006. *Criminology*, 44(4), 807-833.

Alex Piquero and Jeff Bouffard. 2007. "Something Old, Something New: A Preliminary Investigation of Hirschi's Redefined Self-Control." *Justice Quarterly*, 24(1), 1-27.

Alexander Vazsonyi and Lara Belliston. 2007. "The Family, Low Self-Control, Deviance: A Cross-Cultural and Cross-National Test of Self-Control Theory" *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 34(4), 505-530.

Ryan S. King. 2007. *Changing Direction? State Sentencing Reforms 2004-2006*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

In the United States, prison overcrowding and its multi-faceted impact on the criminal justice system has reached a dangerous peak. Mandatory sentencing laws for drug offenses, adoption of “life means life” policies, reductions in parole release, and diminishing prison budgets have put increased strain on correctional systems all across the country. Empirical research has shown that overcrowded prisons tend to foster tense and adverse situations among inmate populations, thus negatively impacting the effectiveness of numerous rehabilitative methods and strategies. Furthermore, the competition for limited resources, as well increases in stress, strain, and aggression, jeopardizes both inmate and public safety.

As a result of this overcrowding issue, the need for comprehensive state sentencing reforms has become increasingly urgent. Between 2004 and 2006, at least 22 states directed their focus towards reforming various sentencing policies in order to counter rising prison populations and reduce overall prison costs. The Sentencing Project report reviewed here details these reforms state-by-state. This review highlights key themes of these sentencing changes. The most common of these reforms has focused on the expansion of sentencing options and funding for drug treatment. At least 13 states, including Pennsylvania, have vastly expanded the number of sentencing options available to non-violent drug offenders. Many of the reforms that were developed include mandates that attempt to provide new pathways to drug and alcohol treatment programs, as well as other alternatives to incarceration for these low-level offenders.

This report argues that hundreds of thousands of low-level drug offenders have served an excessive amount of time in prison due to mandatory minimum sentencing and unjust prison terms. In the state of California alone, over half of the 8,000 offenders serving 25 years to life as a result of “three strikes and you’re out” policy were convicted of a non-violent property or drug offense as their third strike. In addition to contributing to the overcrowding issue, numerous studies have shown that mandatory minimum sentencing and lengthy prison terms produce a counter-effective impact on crime. States such as New York, which has a long history of mandatory minimum sentencing policies, have recently reconsidered and reformed long-standing sentencing laws that were often criticized as more detrimental than beneficial to public safety and correctional efficiency. Furthermore, New York has begun to combine principles of rehabilitation and reentry during the *sentencing* phase in order to promote successful offender reintegration and enhance public safety.

In addition to sentencing reforms aimed at low-risk drug offenders, at least nine states have adopted legislative changes that specifically target the reformation of probation and parole policies. Currently, over 780,000 offenders are on parole in the United States. The article indicates that over one-third (33.3%) of those leaving parole in 2005 returned to jail or prison, a percentage that has doubled since 1980. Prison admission as a result of parole revocation is a costly and inefficient approach that has contributed heavily to overcrowded prisons across the country. In response, recent reforms and provisions enacted by states such as Arizona and California have placed more emphasis

on intermediate sanctions, including community supervision and technological innovations (such as electronic monitoring), rather than sentencing parole violators to custody. Furthermore, several others states, including Arkansas, Minnesota, and Mississippi, have eased parole eligibility for certain individuals, particularly non-violent, first-time drug offenders.

In sum, this report offers a variety of policy-change ideas that seek to control the unnecessary growth within prisons across the United States while maintaining the integrity of the criminal justice system and meeting the goals of sentencing. King contends that state lawmakers must continue to build upon the recent positive changes enacted through sentencing reforms, as well as respond to evidence-based criminal justice policies. Recommendations from the author include the expansion of drug treatment courts as a sentencing option, expansion of options to reduce probation and parole revocations, the utilization of intermediate sanctions for technical violations of parole and probation, the reconsideration of policies regarding time served in prison (including life and long-term sentences), repealing of mandatory minimum sentencing, and the all-encompassing, consistent review of state sentencing and corrections policies across the United States. The stabilization of prison populations will only occur if a combination of the above factors and strategies is implemented. Recent developments in this area are encouraging, but further analysis and examination of the proper use of incarceration is needed in order to ease the pressures currently being exerted in many correctional systems.

Edward W. Gondolf. 2007. "Culturally-Focused Batterer Counseling for African-American Men." *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6(2), 341-366.

One of the most strongly recommended forms of batterer counseling has been culturally-focused counseling for African American men arrested for domestic violence. It is believed that by creating a counseling program with an emphasis on cultural differences and sensitivity specifically for African Americans, the participating men would be more likely to complete the program and be less likely to be re-arrested or re-assault. Researchers also have asserted that African American men with a higher racial identity would have a higher success rate (re-arrest/re-assault) than those without a strong racial identity.

A culturally-focused counseling program was added to an existing batterer program in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. An external expert in culturally-focused counseling trained and evaluated a counselor and colleagues on the appropriate curriculum and methods on a weekly basis for four months to assure program efficiency; one problem area was in locating an African American male counselor with the required credentials to lead the culturally-focused sessions. Nonetheless, the selected culturally-focused counselor received all the necessary training, but had a limited background in group and counseling skills.

A total sample of 503 participants was recruited from a pool of men ordered to attend a battered counseling program by the court system in Pittsburgh. Participants were randomly divided into three different types of counseling courses: one culturally-focused group with only African American men

and an African American counselor; one conventional cognitive behavioral training course with only African American men; one conventional cognitive behavioral training course with a racial mix. The weekly counseling sessions were monitored by researchers who assessed the group leader to assure application of the prescribed curriculum and to avoid “treatment contamination.” Sixty-five men were reassigned at the intake and 64 were reassigned during counseling with 372 completing the entire program; all cohort members received follow up to account for actual participation scenarios.

All participants were required to complete a background questionnaire and several assessment tools, including the Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test, Racial Identity Attitude Scale, research consent notice and contact information form at intake. Intake survey results were used to determine socio-economic background, level of racial identification, alcoholism, drug addiction, etc. for further evaluation of re-arrest and re-assault recidivism. Female partners also were surveyed at intake to ascertain their perceptions of their own safety and likelihood of being assaulted.

During the counseling itself, the victims were contacted via telephone 3, 6, 9, and 12 months after the initial intake, to again obtain their perspectives on how safe they felt and to determine if their life was overall “better” than before the counseling began. The respondents were paid \$10 an interview and 66% and 68% responded at the 6 and 12 month interviews, respectively. Arrest records of the participants also were used to further determine rate of re-arrest and re-assault.

The results of this study indicate that the culturally-focused counseling did not reduce the rate of recidivism in African American men. In fact, the re-assault rates for the men participating in the racially mixed conventional counseling were slightly lower than those men who participated in an African American only counseling session (both conventional and culturally-focused); men in the racially mixed group were half as likely to be arrested for domestic violence than the culturally-focused group. During the 6 month follow up interviews and data collection, it was found that men with a high racial identification, though more likely to complete the African American only counseling sessions, were more likely to have re-assaulted their partners. Also, findings from multivariate analyses revealed that men in the culturally-focused group were 3.5 times more likely than the racially mixed group to be re-arrested for domestic violence.

As a whole the clinical study is influential in determining if culturally-focused counseling reduces recidivism rates of re-assault and re-arrest in domestic violence cases. As with any study, the are limitations that the reader must be aware of when interpreting the findings. As addressed by the authors, one concern is the emphasis on African American men and their racial identity; replication will be absolutely necessary to test if racial identity has any impact. Twenty percent of the men had white partners, despite an overall high self-rating of racial identification among the men. This may have implications for the reporting of domestic violence or its frequency.

Reliance on the partners of the offenders to report re-assaults accurately and honestly is also potentially problematic. Furthermore, it is presumed that the researchers only contacted women who were partners of the offenders at the time of intake; this presumes that the relationship was ongoing and if the relationship was not ongoing the likelihood of re-assault on this individual may have been

greatly reduced. The living situation of the couples was not uniform throughout which again, may alter rates of re-arrest or re-assault due to amount of contact, number of household members, type of home, etc. Finally, the most serious limitation to this study may be the lack of strong empirical evidence for the effectiveness of batterers programs in general. *If* the basic batterers model is theoretically and empirically unsound, tinkering around its edges with additional modules designed to address cultural responsivity issues may be expected to add little value.

Overall, culturally-focused counseling is an important model to investigate further in various locations and settings. However, further controls may provide more accurate and informative data. From this study alone, there is an indication that offenders may benefit most from a culturally sensitive form of batterer counseling courses with a combination of social work and counseling than a stand alone cultural-focused counseling program.

Editors' Note: While this study was funded by the National Institute of Justice, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency had recently funded Dr. Gondolf to conduct a follow-up study of the impact of specialized case management for African American male batterers as an add on to traditional batterers programming. This study also found little impact from the specialized case management approach.

Special Section on Self Control Theory and Offender Behavior

Nearly seventeen years have passed since Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi outlined their theory of low self-control in a groundbreaking book entitled "A General Theory of Crime". The ideas of the book receive no less attention today than when the book was first published seventeen years ago. In fact, in one recent review of the most cited authors and publications in the field of criminology/criminal justice over the past twenty years, Hirschi and Gottfredson consistently scored as the most frequently cited for their work on low self-control theory.¹ Many criminological textbooks point to Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory as among the most important major theoretical developments in recent years for furthering our understanding of the etiology of criminal behavior. While tremendously popular and empirically supported by a number of follow-up studies, Gottfredson and Hirschi's low self-control theory has nonetheless been fairly controversial and has received challenges on a number of fronts. The theory lays stake to some rather bold claims, purporting to be a general theory that "explains all crime, at all times". Below is an outline of the major components of Gottfredson and Hirschi's low self-control theory, a discussion of the points of contention as well as the overall empirical status of the theory, a summary of the policy implications proceeding from the theory, and a number of brief reviews of recent tests of the theory.

¹ Cohn, Ellen and Farrington, David. 2007. "Changes in Scholarly Influence in Major American Criminology and Criminal Justice Journals between 1986 and 2000." *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*: 18(1), 6-34.

Gottfredson and Hirschi base their theory on the assumption that self-interested behavior is normal to human nature and therefore what must be explained by any theory of crime is the absence rather than the presence of criminal behavior.² In generating their theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi begin by making several observations about the nature and characteristics of both criminals and criminal acts. From their reading of the research, they observe that: 1) crime is mostly simple and does not require a great deal of training, planning, or effort, 2) crime provides immediate gratification, 3) criminals are versatile and tend not to specialize in any one criminal activity, 4) those who commit crimes are also more likely to participate in other risky social behaviors, and 5) there appears to be a great deal of continuity/stability in an individual's proclivity to commit crimes over time. From these observations about the nature and characteristics of criminals and crime, Gottfredson and Hirschi generate their concept of criminal propensity (or criminality), the primary element of which is a stable trait they label 'low self-control'. They find low self-control to fit well as a marker of criminal propensity since those with low self-control tend to be impulsive, insensitive, short-sighted, risk-takers, and thrill-seekers. Further, low self-control appears to be a relatively stable trait across an individual's lifespan. These characteristics of low self-control are consistent with their observations of the nature of criminals and criminal acts.

Gottfredson and Hirschi assert that low self-control is primarily established through ineffective child-rearing. According to the theory, if parents are not able to instill self-control in their child by generally about the age of ten, low self-control becomes a stable trait which persists throughout the child's adult life and can be thought of as the child's criminal propensity. The minimum requirements of effective child rearing for instilling self-control include: 1) adequately monitoring the child's behavior, 2) recognizing deviant behavior when it occurs, and 3) fairly and consistently punishing such behavior when it occurs. With Gottfredson and Hirschi's emphasis on the early childhood and on parenting, the theory obviously has found favor with many developmental psychologists.

A primary element necessary for understanding Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory is their explanation of the relationship between age and crime. They provide evidence to support the conclusion that age has a direct impact on criminal behavior and that the age impact is universal (i.e., invariant across different times, places, demographic groups, and crime types). More specifically, all criminal careers generally follow what is labeled as the "age-crime curve", which means that criminal behavior increases during adolescence, peaks by the late teens to early twenties, and declines thereafter. Gottfredson and Hirschi are not entirely clear on an explanation for this effect of age on crime, but suggest that it may be explained by factors such as "burn-out" due to natural biological aging or a reduced opportunity for criminal behavior at older ages. One thing that they are clear on is that it is not due to any known social factors such as getting married, having a job, or disassociating from anti-social friends. They are in fact critical of those who suggest that social circumstances, such as hanging around with bad friends or losing a job, causes an individual to commit crimes. These circumstances are viewed by Gottfredson and Hirschi as situations which are

²This assumption of human nature is part of what is often called the "classical school" of criminology. Classical criminology is a school of thought encompassing a variety of criminological theories, including some of the oldest existing criminological theories.

self-selected into by those with low self-control, and not as situations which cause criminal behavior. For example, those who already possess a high propensity for criminal behavior will naturally choose to hang around with others who have a high propensity for criminal behavior (the old “birds of a feather flock together” argument).

In addition to viewing an individual’s underlying criminal propensity as being constant over time (even at older ages when the individual actually commits less crime), Gottfredson and Hirschi also propose that there is a relative stability of criminal behavior between individuals. What this means is that an individual with extremely low self-control (i.e., a high criminal propensity) will still commit more crimes at age 50 than an individual at age 50 with only moderately low self-control, even though both individuals will commit less crimes at age 50 than they did at age 20. So while the offender’s criminal behavior decreases over time, his or her criminal propensity is still constant and his or her relative ordering of criminal behavior in comparison to others is constant. Essentially then, Gottfredson and Hirsch argue that the adult lifecourse is mostly irrelevant for understanding criminal behavior.

Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory has certainly been among the most tested theories of criminal behavior. Perhaps the most comprehensive summary of the empirical status of their theory is found in a meta-analysis conducted by Travis Pratt and Francis Cullen.³ This meta-analysis summarizes results from 21 individual tests of the theory. Pratt and Cullen conclude that, regardless of how self-control is measured, low self-control is a strong and robust predictor of crime among diverse samples, lending strong support for the theory. However, the impact of self-control on crime was not found to be as strong in longitudinal studies, calling into question the theory’s hypothesis that low self-control is a stable trait over the lifecourse.

Due in no small part to the bold assertions of the theory, several points of the theory remain quite contentious and unresolved. First, it is unclear as to how stable criminal propensity is across the lifecourse. On a related point, it has also been highly debated as to whether the age-crime curve is invariant.⁴ If Gottfredson and Hirschi’s propositions on these two issues hold up to empirical testing, meaning that criminal propensity indeed remains virtually unchanged in adulthood and all criminals eventually “age out” of crime regardless of what happens to them, then corrections professionals face a nearly impossible task of making any significant impact on criminal behavior.

A second unresolved issue is the definition and measurement of low self-control. Gottfredson and Hirschi provided a somewhat broad definition of low self-control in their book and have evolved their definition since the book. A core issue in this debate is whether low self-control is measured primarily by behavior or by attitudes. Early on, Gottfredson and Hirschi mostly argued for a behavioral measure of low self-control by suggesting that key indicators for low self-control

³ Pratt, Travis and Cullen, Francis. 2000. “The Empirical Status of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s General Theory of Crime: A Meta-Analysis.” *Criminology*: 38, 3.

⁴ The issue of an invariant age-crime curve was the subject of a heated debate between Gottfredson and Hirschi and Alfred Blumstein et. al. in the mid 1980’s, which has been frequently referred to as “the great debate” in criminology.

included “analogous behaviors” such as promiscuous sexual behavior or compulsive gambling. On the other hand, Grasmick and colleagues have proposed an attitudinal measure of low self-control, which is considered by many as the most validated measure of the construct.⁵ While important to resolve, the current state of knowledge indicates that low self-control is a strong predictor of criminal behavior regardless of how it is measured.

Gottfredson and Hirschi’s early definition of low self-control raises a third contentious point. Many have criticized the theory as being tautological. These critics point out that, according to the theory’s propositions, “analogous behavior” such as smoking or compulsive gambling serves as an indicator of low self-control and is caused by low self-control at one and the same time. This seems to add a degree of circular logic to the theory. Gottfredson and Hirschi have addressed this critique but it remains a point of debate.

A fourth general point of contention is the whole issue of social causation versus social selection. In other words, do social events such as employment and marriage causally impact future criminal behavior or do individuals self-select themselves into these social situations according to their prior criminal propensity. There has been considerable debate on this issue and it appears as if the answer may lie somewhere in the middle.

Finally, a fifth issue of the theory that is still debated (though mostly resolved) is whether or not offenders specialize in certain criminal behavior. Gottfredson and Hirschi hold that offenders by in large do not specialize and thus they claim that their theory is a general theory explaining all crime. The bulk of the evidence has agreed with them that offenders mostly do not specialize.

Below are several short summaries of recent tests of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory, followed by a short discussion of policy implications:

Charles Tittle and Ekaterina Botchkovar. 2005. “Self-Control, Criminal Motivation and Deterrence: An Investigation Using Russian Respondents.” <i>Criminology</i> , 43(2), 307-354.

Using data from a Russian sample, the authors examine the generality of self-control theory. They find evidence to conclude that the strength of the relationship between low self-control and criminal behavior is comparable to that found in other studies, suggesting that the theory is not culturally bound and therefore is a general theory in this sense. It is noteworthy to point out that low self-control theory has also been tested in the past among other ethnic groups including Japanese, Europeans, African-Americans, and Native Americans, all more or less finding reasonable evidence for the generality of the theory.

⁵ Grasmick, Harold, Charles Tittle, Robert Bursik, and Bruce Arneklev. 1993. “Testing the Core empirical Implications of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s General Theory of Crime.” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 30:5-29.

John Paul Wright and Kevin Beaver. 2005. "Do Parents Matter in Creating Self-Control in Their Children? A Genetically Informed Test of Gottfredson and Hirschi's Theory of Low Self-Control." *Criminology*, 43(4), 1169-1202.

The authors of this article point out that relatively little research has examined the factors that give rise to low self-control. Gottfredson and Hirschi would seem to propose that parents are the sole contributors. This article finds evidence to suggest that heritable genetic differences may more strongly explain the development of low self-control. The impact of parenting is found to still be important but mostly by interacting with genetic differences. In other words, parents will have more difficulty instilling self-control in children who possess the genetic risk factors for low self-control than in children who do not possess these risk factors. Genetic indicators include deficits in the frontostriatal part of the brain and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Constance Chapple. 2005. "Self-Control, Peer Relations, and Delinquency." *Justice Quarterly*, 22(1), 89-106.

This study examines the social causation versus social selection debate, particularly as it pertains to the impact of delinquent peers. The authors find mixed evidence for Gottfredson and Hirschi's position that delinquent peers will not influence delinquent behavior once low self-control (i.e., criminal propensity) is taken into account. Consistent with low self-control theory, associating with delinquent peers did not contribute much to delinquency once low self-control was taken into account. On the other hand, peer rejection was an important cause of delinquency even after accounting for self-control, which is contrary to the position of low self-control theory.

Lorraine Latimore, Charles Tittle, and Harold Grasmick. 2006. "Childrearing, Self-Control, and Crime: Additional Evidence." *Sociological Inquiry*, 76(3), 343-371.

The authors of this study examine whether the three critical elements of effective child-rearing for instilling self-control (i.e., adequately monitoring behavior, recognizing deviant behavior when it occurs, and fairly and consistently punishing deviant behavior) are indeed significantly related to self-control. They find that while the elements, both individually and in combination, are related to increased self-control, the relationship is not very strong. The conclusion of these results is that effective self-control is most likely dependent on other things in addition to good parenting. The study does not specifically test for other potential contributors but hints that self-control may even be influenced by factors in adulthood, contrary to what Gottfredson and Hirsch propose in their theory.

Callie Burt, Ronald Simons, and Leslie Simons. 2006. "A Longitudinal Test of the Effects of Parenting and the Stability of Self-Control: Negative Evidence for the General Theory of Crime." *Criminology*, 44(2), 353-396.

This study tests two propositions of Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory: 1) that poor parenting impacts delinquency by failing to instill self-control and 2) that low self-control is stable throughout life after

the age of ten. In both cases the authors find disconfirming evidence. While self-control is indeed found to be related to delinquency, it only partially explains the relationship between poor parenting and delinquency. In other words, some additional quality of poor parenting leads to increased delinquency other than simply failing to instill self-control. Also, self-control is found to be changeable later in life, implying that low self-control can be improved through appropriate intervention or social experiences. The authors caution against strong conclusions from this study due to several limitations, including not following the study participants into adulthood to more fully measure the stability of their level of self-control. They thus call for both further replications of their findings and a softening of some of the propositions of Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory.

Carter Hay and Walter Forrest. 2006. "The Development of Self-Control: Examining Self-Control Theory's Stability Thesis." *Criminology*, 44(4), 739-774.

Similar to the previously summarized study, this study explores the stability of self-control after the age of ten. The study sets out to provide "the most rigorous test to date" of this stability thesis and largely accomplishes this goal, improving on prior methodological weaknesses. The authors conclude that the absolute and relative level of self-control was stable for 84% of the sample, confirming Gottfredson and Hirschi's thesis. There was, however, a smaller sub-sample (16% of the sample) who experienced substantial changes in self-control after the age of ten. Also, parental influences continued to affect self-control well into adolescence. This study provides strong support for Gottfredson and Hirschi's stability thesis, while at the same time concluding that the stability thesis is not as absolute as suggested by Gottfredson and Hirschi given that about one in six respondents demonstrated significant changes in their self-control after age ten.

Elaine Doherty. 2006. "Self-Control, Social Bonds, and Desistance: A Test of Life-Course Interdependence." 2006. *Criminology*, 44(4), 807-833.

In this study, the author attempts to examine the extent to which both self-control and social situations can simultaneously impact desistance from crime. Recall that Gottfredson and Hirschi would say that social situations such as employment, marriage, or friends, are irrelevant for explaining adult desistance from crime. However, this author finds that both a person's level of self-control and level of social integration are strong predictors of criminal desistance. In other words, an individual with high self-control or who is more socially integrated is significantly more likely to desist. The author also attempts to follow up on previous studies which have explored whether those with low self-control would show greater reductions in offending if socially integrated than those with high self-control. She finds that this is largely not the case; self-control and social integration have mostly independent effects.

Alex Piquero and Jeff Bouffard. 2007. "Something Old, Something New: A Preliminary Investigation of Hirschi's Redefined Self-Control." *Justice Quarterly*, 24(1), 1-27.

This study attempts to: 1) examine the predictive ability of an instrument intended to measure Hirschi's recently revised definition of self-control, and 2) compare this instrument to Grasmick's

attitudinal measure of self-control. Hirschi has recently redefined self-control as “the tendency to consider the full range of potential costs of a particular act”. The authors find that their instrument, based on this new definition, is strongly associated with two types of criminal acts (i.e, drunk driving and sexual coercion). Further, when their measure and Grasmick’s attitudinal measure are both used, Grasmick’s measure is no longer associated with these two types of criminal acts. The authors conclude that situational-based measures of self-control should be more seriously considered and may replace or at least be incorporated with attitudinally-based measures.

Alexander Vazsonyi and Lara Belliston. 2007. “The Family, Low Self-Control, Deviance: A Cross-Cultural and Cross-National Test of Self-Control Theory” *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 34(4), 505-530.

This study is another examination of the link between family/parenting, low self-control, and deviant behavior. From a large sample of seven different cultural and national groups, the authors find that family processes such as closeness, support, and monitoring have a consistently strong impact on deviant behavior. Not all of the family impact on deviant behavior is indirectly through its impact on self-control either, which is consistent with Burt et. al.’s findings previously summarized. In other words, something more about family socialization has an impact on deviant behavior other than simply instilling self-control. This piece confirms the generalizability of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory to different cultural/ethnic groups but only partially confirms their thesis on the relationship between parenting, self-control, and deviance.

Summary

Gottfredson and Hirschi’s low self-control theory contains several important policy implications for criminal justice professionals to consider. Perhaps the most important consideration for corrections professionals is their invariance thesis. If indeed criminal propensity remains mostly unchangeable after age ten and no social variables can explain reductions in criminal behavior over time, then correctional programming would be expected to have very minimal impact on future criminal behavior. Fortunately for corrections professionals, tests of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory mostly conclude that there is more room for change in criminal propensity than acknowledged by the theory. Further, we now know from correctional program evaluations over the past 30 years that criminal behavior can be impacted through correctional treatment.⁶

On the other hand, many tests of low self-control theory (including a few of those summarized above) find an impressive degree of stability in criminal propensity over time, suggesting that human change occurs less frequently than many corrections professionals are comfortable with admitting. In discussing continuity versus change in criminal behavior over time, what Gottfredson and Hirschi are perhaps best at doing is focusing our attention on the importance of early childhood. Regardless of the degree of change that is possible later in life, clearly early childhood is an extremely important phase of the lifecourse for impacting future criminal behavior. Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory

⁶ see this link for a summary of the correctional “what works” literature and the principles of effective correctional intervention: <http://www.cor.state.pa.us/stats/lib/stats/PrinciplesofEffectiveIntervention.pdf>

would seem to suggest that broader social policy targeting childhood risk factors may provide the greatest “bang for the buck” in preventing criminal behavior. The good news seems to be that there is certainly room for influencing change among adult offenders later in life. The bad news is that the potential for impacting change in adult offenders may be more limited when compared with the impact which is possible through childhood interventions.

Aside from the invariance debate, the consensus from tests of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory is that self-control is certainly among the most important targets related to criminal behavior. The PA DOC’s own Parole Violator Study also provides confirming evidence of low self-control as a major criminogenic risk factor differentiating recidivists from non-recidivists (see summary of this study in *Research In Review* Vol. 8, No. 1 and Vol. 9, No. 4). Technically the Parole Violator Study refers to ‘poor problem-solving or coping skills’ instead of ‘low self-control’, but a reading of the study’s results reveal that there are many similarities in what is being measured by these two constructs.

Related to the issue of the importance of low self-control as a treatment target is the issue of how to measure or assess self-control. If an individual’s level of self-control can indeed change, then clinicians must have a way to assess self-control so as to prioritize related treatment towards those with a higher need. Although not exactly the same as pilot-testing a measure of self-control, the PA DOC has pilot tested two instruments for assessing problem-solving skills. Unfortunately neither instrument was found to be valid among an offender sample. As was discussed previously, assessing low self-control has been a major debate that remains unsettled in the discussion of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory. Self-control needs to be more clearly operationalized. Additionally, instruments measuring self-control must be refined, validated, and compared to one another in order to provide treatment staff with the proper clinical tool to assess what is already known to be an important domain.

Finally, some policy implications can be drawn from the debate on causation versus correlation. From a risk assessment perspective, it matters little whether a variable causes crime or is simply correlated with crime. If it is strongly enough correlated to criminal behavior so as to improve the predictive ability of a risk assessment, then it should be included on the instrument. On the other hand, from a treatment perspective, clinicians want to focus more of their time on root causes rather than symptoms. So in this sense it is important to disentangle whether certain risk factors cause criminal behavior or are simply correlated with criminal behavior. For example, it is not disputed that hanging out with pro-criminal friends is strongly correlated with one’s own criminal behavior. However, Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory would suggest that this is simply a function of the individual’s prior level of low self-control and that one’s friends don’t cause one to commit more or less crimes. If this is the case, treatment should spend more time on building self-control skills rather than on discouraging the individual to disassociate with pro-criminal friends. If one’s pro-criminal friends do however cause an otherwise low risk person to commit more future crimes, then considerable time would need to be spent discouraging these friendships. It appears from studies on this issue that the answer may lie somewhere in between causation and correlation, but it will be important for future research to disentangle the weight of each so as to understand which happens more or less frequently. From a research perspective, causation is difficult to demonstrate minus a randomized experiment. Obviously researchers can’t feasibly or ethically conduct studies where, for

instance, participants are randomly assigned to hang around with certain friends. With the advent of longitudinal datasets and more sophisticated statistical techniques, however, researchers are making progress towards having the tools to properly disentangle causation from correlation.