

## Chapter 1

# Perspectives on Delinquency

Three fundamental perspectives on delinquency and deviant behavior dominate the current scene. According to strain or motivational theories, legitimate desires that conformity cannot satisfy force a person into deviance.<sup>1</sup> According to *control* or bond theories, a person is free to commit delinquent acts because his ties to the conventional order have somehow been broken.<sup>2</sup> According to *cultural deviance* theories, the deviant conforms to a set of standards not accepted by a larger or more powerful society.<sup>3</sup> Although most current theories of crime and delinquency contain elements of at least two and occasionally all three of these perspectives,

<sup>1</sup> The purest example of a strain theory, contaminated only rarely by assumptions appropriate to a control theory, is found in Merton's "Social Structure and Anomie" (Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* [New York: The Free Press, 1957], pp. 131-160). One characteristic of strain theory is that the motivation to crime overcomes or eliminates restraints—such as considerations of morality (see also Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* [New York: The Free Press, 1951], pp. 249-325). Because Merton traces his intellectual history to Durkheim, strain theories are often called "anomie" theories (see Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity* [New York: The Free Press, 1960], especially pp. 77-143). Actually, Durkheim's theory is one of the purest examples of control theory: both anomie and egoism are conditions of "deregulation," and the "aberrant" behavior that follows is an automatic consequence of such deregulation.

<sup>2</sup> Control theories take many forms, but all of the works by control theorists listed below explicitly adopt the assumption that I take as essential to this perspective. David Matza, *Delinquency and Drift* (New York: Wiley, 1964). F. Ivan Nye, *Family Relationships and Delinquent Behavior* (New York: Wiley, 1958). Walter C. Reckless, *The Crime Problem*, 4th ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), Ch. 22. See also Jackson Toby, "Hoodlum or Businessman: An American Dilemma," *The Jews*, ed. Marshall Sklare (New York: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 542-550, and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "Delinquency as the Failure of Personal and Social Controls," *American Sociological Review*, XVI (1951), 196-207.

<sup>3</sup> I take the term "cultural deviance" from a paper by Ruth Kornhauser, "Theoretical Issues in the Sociological Study of Juvenile Delinquency," mimeographed, Center for the Study of Law and Society, Berkeley, 1963. Other terms for theories of this type are "cultural conflict," "transmission," "sub-cultural," and "differential association." The most influential theory of cultural deviance is Sutherland's theory of differential association (see Edwin H. Sutherland and Donald R. Cressey, *Principles of Criminology*, 7th ed. [Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966], pp. 77-83). See also Walter B. Miller, "Lower

reconciliation of their assumptions is very difficult.<sup>4</sup> If, as the control theorist assumes, the ties of many persons to the conventional order may be weak or virtually nonexistent, the strain theorist, in accounting for their deviance, builds into his explanation pressure that is unnecessary. If, on the other hand, it is reasonable to assume with the strain theorist that everyone is at some point strongly tied to the conventional system, then it is unreasonable to assume that many are not (control theories), or that many are tied to different "conventional" systems (cultural deviance theories).

In the present study I analyze a large body of data on delinquency collected in Western Contra Costa County, California, contrasting throughout the assumptions of the strain, control, and cultural deviance theories. I begin by outlining the assumptions of these theories and discussing the logical and empirical difficulties attributed to each of them. I then draw from many sources an outline of *social control* theory, the theory that informs the subsequent analysis and which is advocated here.

## Strain Theories

Strain theories are the historical result of good answers to a bad question.<sup>5</sup> The question was Hobbes's: "Why do men obey Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency," *The Journal of Social Issues*, XIV (1958), 5-19.

<sup>4</sup> The most forthright attempt to construct a theory combining assumptions from two of these perspectives is Cloward and Ohlin's synthesis of strain and cultural deviance theories (*Delinquency and Opportunity*). Kornhauser concludes that they have "constructed theories of subcultural delinquency that are congruent with social disorganization [strain] theories but unacceptable to cultural transmission theorists" ("Theoretical Issues," Part III, p. 4). My own analysis had led to the conclusion that the Cloward-Ohlin synthesis was unacceptable to both strain and cultural deviance theorists. In any event, the difficulties are clearer in Richard A. Cloward's "Illegitimate Means, Anomie, and Deviant Behavior," *American Sociological Review*, XXIV (1959), 164-176.

<sup>5</sup> For the opposite and generally accepted view, see Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: The Free Press, 1949), pp. 89-94, and Dennis H. Wrong, "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Society," *American Sociological Review*, XXVI (1961), 183-193. The question is bad because it assumes that something clearly variable is in fact constant. In their attempts to get out of this difficulty, sociologists are forced to pose the opposite question, which leads to the "interminable dialogue" which Wrong notes and approves of. Actually, of course, the problem of conformity and the problem of deviance are the same problem, and questions concerning conformity and deviance should be posed in such a manner that both problems can be solved at once.

the rules of society?" Although the Hobbesian question is granted a central place in the history of sociological theory, few have accepted the Hobbesian answer: "Of all passions, that which inclines men least to break the laws, is fear. Nay, excepting some generous natures, it is the only thing, when there is appearance of profit or pleasure by breaking the laws, that makes men keep them."<sup>6</sup> It is not so, the sociologist argued: there is more to conformity than fear. Man has an "attitude of respect" toward the rules of society; he "internalizes the norms." Since man has a conscience, he is not free simply to calculate the costs of illegal or deviant behavior. He feels *morally* obligated to conform, whether or not it is to his advantage to do so.<sup>7</sup> As if this were not enough to show that Hobbes was wrong, the sociologist adduced yet another powerful source of conformity: "People are . . . profoundly sensitive to the expectations of others."<sup>8</sup> Now, since others almost by definition expect one to conform, deviation can occur only at great cost to the deviator.

Having thus established that man is a moral animal who desires to obey the rules, the sociologist was then faced with the problem of explaining his deviance. Clearly, if men desire to conform, they must be under great pressure before they will resort to deviance. In the classic strain theories, this pressure is provided by *legitimate* desires.<sup>9</sup> A man desires success, for example, as everyone tells him he should, but he cannot attain success conforming to the rules; consequently, in desperation, he turns to deviant behavior or crime to attain that which he considers rightfully his. The theoretical assumption that man is moral and the empirical fact that he violates rules in which he believes are thus made consistent.

Examples of this perspective are numerous:

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. 195.

<sup>7</sup> Parsons, *Structure*, especially pp. 378-390.

<sup>8</sup> Francis X. Sutton et al., *The American Business Creed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 264, quoted by Wrong, "The Oversocialized Conception," p. 188.

<sup>9</sup> There was a more or less conscious attempt in one period of American sociology to avoid the evil-causes-evil "fallacy." Vices were consequently traced to prior virtues or to virtuous institutions: for example, crime to ambition, prostitution to marriage. The most sophisticated spokesman for this good-causes-evil view is Albert K. Cohen (see, for example, his "Multiple Factor Approaches" in Marvin E. Wolfgang et al., eds., *The Sociology of Crime and Delinquency* [New York: Wiley, 1962], pp. 77-80).

... a cardinal American virtue, "ambition," promotes a cardinal American vice, "deviant behavior."<sup>10</sup>

We suggest that many lower-class adolescents experience desperation born of the certainty that their position in the economic structure is relatively fixed and immutable—a desperation made all the more poignant by their exposure to a cultural ideology in which failure to orient oneself upward is regarded as a moral defect and failure to become mobile as proof of it.<sup>11</sup>

Although the strain model has been applied to deviant acts that appear to be the result of cold calculation (the "decision" to become a professional criminal), it has been particularly appealing as an explanation of acts that are characterized by apparent irrationality or intense emotion (such as suicide and malicious and/or "pointless" destruction of property). Since the strain theorist uses such concepts as "discontent," "frustration," or "deprivation" as part of his explanation of deviant acts, he can easily transfer some of the emotion producing the act to the act itself. This virtue of strain theory is at the same time a source of difficulty.

#### Criticisms of Strain Theory

The strain theorist must provide motivation to delinquency sufficient to account for the neutralization of moral constraints. Once he builds motivation as powerful as this into his explanatory system, he usually has a plausible explanation of delinquency. "Intense frustration" would seem to provide sufficient motivational energy to account for "delinquency." In fact, given the seriousness of most delinquent acts, it provides a little too much pressure; and during the days, weeks, or months that the intensely frustrated boy is conforming to conventional expectations, its dormancy is hard to explain.

The fact that most delinquent boys eventually become law-abiding adults is also a source of embarrassment to the strain theorist. The conditions he builds into his model normally do not change during adolescence or, for that matter, at the attainment of adulthood. As the strain theorist himself contends, the lower-class boy's position in the economic structure is relatively fixed. His

<sup>10</sup> Merton, *Social Theory*, p. 146.

<sup>11</sup> Cloward and Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity*, pp. 106-107.

eventual reform, attested to by many empirical studies,<sup>12</sup> thus cannot be explained by changes in the conditions that initially forced him into delinquency.<sup>13</sup>

*Delinquency is not confined to the lower classes.* In order to get the pressure he needs, the strain theorist usually creates a perfect relation between social class and delinquency.<sup>14</sup> This relation is "created": the strain theorist is interested in explaining only *lower-class delinquency*.<sup>15</sup> Since there is no lower-class delinquency in the middle classes, the strain theorist may ask: What is it about the lower-class situation that produces delinquency? If he ever feels called upon to explain middle-class delinquency, the strain theorist has two options: he can argue that apparently middle-class boys committing delinquent acts are "really" lower-class boys;<sup>16</sup> or he can reverse his original procedure and ask:

<sup>12</sup> Much of this literature is summarized and critically evaluated in Barbara Wootton, *Social Science and Social Pathology* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 157-172. Actually, one may derive contradictory statements from research on "reform." The statement in the text (most delinquent boys eventually become law-abiding adults) is true, but so, too, is the statement that most delinquent boys will be arrested for crimes as adults. The reconciliation of these statements is simple: the first relies upon a broader definition of delinquency than does the latter. To be meaningful, then, such statements must specify fairly carefully the degree of delinquency entailed. Follow-up studies of boys appearing in juvenile court suggest that a majority will be arrested for crimes as adults (see Henry D. McKay, "Report on the Criminal Careers of Male Delinquents in Chicago," *Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime*, Report of The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice [Washington: USGPO, 1967], pp. 107-113, and Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Juvenile Delinquents Grown Up* [New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1940]. Follow-up studies of boys picked up by the police would show that the vast majority will not be arrested for crimes as adults (see Matza, *Delinquency and Drift*, pp. 22-26, nn. 30, 31).

Since strain theories attempt to explain the behavior of more or less serious offenders, the fact that the "great majority" of delinquent boys become law-abiding adults is not, strictly speaking, evidence against these theories. In the end, however, this criticism does not depend on a shift in the definition of delinquency. The fact is that strain theory has difficulty with "maturational reform" regardless of the proportion actually reforming.

<sup>13</sup> The importance of maturational reform as a problem for most theories of delinquency is abundantly documented in Matza, *Delinquency and Drift*, pp. 22-26.

<sup>14</sup> A perfect ecological correlation and/or a perfect individual relation as defined by such measures as Yule's *O*. In short, low social class is a necessary but not sufficient condition for delinquency, as delinquency is defined.

<sup>15</sup> Cloward and Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity*, pp. 27-30; Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys* (New York: The Free Press, 1955), pp. 36-44.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*, pp. 157-161; Robert H. Bohlke, "Social Mobility: Stratification Inconsistency and Middle Class Delinquency," *Social Problems*, VIII (1961), 351-363.

what is it about the middle-class situation that produces (middle-class) delinquency?<sup>17</sup>

Every theorist discusses the actual class distribution of delinquency and attempts to base his decision to restrict his explanation to the lower class on an evaluation of available evidence. Implicit in such an effort is a criterion for deciding whether the relation between social class and delinquency is sufficiently strong to justify a class theory of delinquency. What is this criterion? How strong a relation between social class and delinquency is required to justify a class theory of delinquency?

The mere raising of these questions emphasizes the shakiness of the factual and logical foundations upon which strain theory is erected, since it is common among strain theorists themselves to question the correlation between class and crime.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, recent delinquency research has tended to support this skepticism and more and more to undermine any theory that takes social class as the starting point for an explanation of juvenile delinquency.<sup>19</sup>

High aspirations are not conducive to delinquency. All strain theories generate pressure to delinquency from a *discrepancy* between aspirations and expectations. In order directly to test a strain theory, it is thus necessary to measure at least two independent variables simultaneously. (In Robert K. Merton's original theory, aspirations were assumed to be uniformly high within American society, and a discrepancy could thus be inferred directly from the realistically low expectations of segments of the population. However, subsequent research has undercut the assumption that all Americans place high and equal value on success, as Merton defined it.)<sup>20</sup> The need to measure two independent

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*, pp. 162-169 (Cohen exercises both options); Ralph W. England, Jr., "A Theory of Middle Class Juvenile Delinquency," *Readings in Juvenile Delinquency*, ed. Ruth Shonle Cavan (Philadelphia: Lipincott, 1964), pp. 66-75.

<sup>18</sup> See Merton, *Social Theory*, pp. 141-145, and Cloward, "Illegitimate Means," p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> This literature is summarized and discussed in Chapter IV.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert H. Hyman, "The Value Systems of Different Classes," *Class, Status and Power*, ed. Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset (New York: The Free Press, 1953), pp. 426-442. Hyman shows that lower-class persons are less likely to have high aspirations. In a reply to Hyman, Merton argues (*Social Theory*, pp. 170-176) that the problem is one of absolute frequencies rather than proportions. Actually the problem is one of correlation: Are lower-class persons with high aspirations more likely to become criminal than lower-class persons with low aspirations?

variables at once has tended to shield strain theory from potentially falsifying evidence: for example, the finding that legitimate aspirations are negatively related to delinquency could be countered by the argument that the relation would become positive if expectations were held constant.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, much indirect evidence that the desires upon which the strain theorist relies were at work has been provided by research which shows relations between delinquency and factors that presumably impede the realization of these desires, such as school failure. In fact, on the basis of this indirect evidence, strain theories appear to have substantial empirical support, and research articles in which one of them provides the interpretive framework appear regularly.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, there is some direct evidence that the relation between aspirations and delinquency does not reverse when expectations are held constant,<sup>23</sup> that many delinquents are not deprived in an objective sense,<sup>24</sup> and that many delinquents do not feel deprived in the ways suggested by strain theorists.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, I tentatively reject strain theory on the ground

<sup>21</sup> Kornhauser, "Theoretical Issues," Part I, pp. 21-22.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Erdman B. Palmore and Phillip E. Hammond, "Interacting Factors in Juvenile Delinquency," *American Sociological Review*, XXIX (1964), 848-854; Delbert S. Elliott, "Delinquency, School Attendance and Dropout," *Social Problems*, XIII (1966), 307-314. Palmore and Hammond rely on Cloward and Ohlin's theory, and Elliott relies on Cohen's.

<sup>23</sup> James F. Short, Jr., "Gang Delinquency and Anomie," *Anomie and Deviant Behavior*, ed. Marshall B. Clinard (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 105-115. As far as I can determine, there is no good evidence to the contrary. Two studies apparently to the contrary are Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Rebellion in a High School* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1964), and Irving Spergel, *Racketville, Slumtown, Haulburg* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). In Stinchcombe's study, the hypothesis that "whenever the goals of success are strongly internalized but inaccessible, expressive alienation results" is the subject of much analysis. I think it fair to say that this hypothesis explains very little of the "expressive alienation" in Stinchcombe's sample, and that the links between concepts and indicators with respect to this hypothesis are tenuous. Stinchcombe acknowledges the shakiness of his hypothesis and remains faithful to it only because he feels no alternative hypothesis is available.

Spergel's study is based on comparisons of three groups, each consisting of ten boys. Although his data often conform to minutely detailed hypotheses derived from strain theory, they are in effect ecological data since variation on delinquency within the groups is consistently ignored.

<sup>24</sup> Larry Karacki and Jackson Toby, "The Uncommitted Adolescent: Candidate for Gang Socialization," *Sociological Inquiry*, XXXII (1962), 203-215.

<sup>25</sup> Albert J. Reiss, Jr., and A. Lewis Rhodes, "Status Deprivation and Delinquent Behavior," *The Sociological Quarterly*, IV (1963), 135-149.



that it is inadequate and misleading. It suggests that delinquency is a relatively permanent attribute of the person and/or a regularly occurring event; it suggests that delinquency is largely restricted to a single social class; and it suggests that persons accepting legitimate goals are, as a result of this acceptance, more likely to commit delinquent acts. Much of the discussion and data which follow will bear on my position that these suggestions are inadequate and misleading.

### Control Theories

If strain theories may be traced to answers to Hobbes's question, control theories may be traced to the question itself. Strain theories assume that the Hobbesian question has been answered, that the important question is, "Why do men *not* obey the rules of society?" Conformity is taken for granted; deviance is problematic. In control theories, the Hobbesian question has never been adequately answered. The question remains, "Why *do* men obey the rules of society?" Deviance is taken for granted; conformity must be explained.<sup>26</sup>

In strain theory, man is a moral animal. His morality accounts for the pressure that is built into the model. If morality is removed, however, if man is seen as an amoral animal, then tremendous pressure is unnecessary in accounting for his deviance. It is just such a removal of the moral roadblock that explains the deem-

<sup>26</sup> Cohen's oft-quoted statement that "a theory of deviant behavior not only must account for the occurrence of deviant behavior, it must also account for its failure to occur" is followed by the statement that "the explanation of one necessarily implies the explanation of the other." A sociologist trained to think in terms of variables is likely to translate the latter statement as "the explanation of deviance has to be an explanation of conformity"—as Stinchcombe in fact translates it. But then the statement is no longer true. For, in fact, many present-day explanations of conformity make it very difficult to explain deviance, although, as Cohen rightly suggests and as I have tried to show in the preceding section, these theories of conformity do have profound implications for the theories of deviance that accompany them. See Albert K. Cohen, "The Study of Social Disorganization and Deviant Behavior," *Sociology Today*, ed. Robert K. Merton et al. (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 463, and Stinchcombe, *Rebellion*, p. 4. (Emphasis in both statements supplied.)

This contrast in what is taken for granted has been noted frequently in the literature. See, for example, Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), pp. 26-27, and David J. Bordua, "Sociological Perspectives," *Social Deviancy Among Youth*, ed. William W. Wattenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 84-85.

phasis on motivation that is characteristic of control theory: "It is our position, therefore, that in general behavior prescribed as delinquent or criminal need not be explained in any positive sense, since it usually results in quicker and easier achievement of goals than the normative behavior."<sup>27</sup>

It is oversimplification to say, however, that strain theory assumes a moral man while control theory assumes an amoral man. Control theory merely assumes variation in morality: for some men, considerations of morality are important; for others, they are not. Because his perspective allows him to free some men from moral sensitivities, the control theorist is likely to shift to a second line of social control—to the rational, calculational component in conformity and deviation. This emphasis on calculation is reflected in a recent proposal by theorists operating from within this perspective: "The idea of paying boys to conform is sufficiently intriguing to merit study and experimentation."<sup>28</sup>

The criticisms of control theory stemming from these and related assumptions are discussed in the following chapter, where a control theory of delinquency is presented in greater detail.

### Theories of Cultural Deviance

A third set of theories assumes that men are incapable of committing "deviant" acts. A person may indeed commit acts deviant by the standards of, say, middle-class society, but he cannot commit acts deviant by his own standards. In other words, theorists from this school see deviant behavior as *conformity* to a set of standards not accepted by a larger (that is, more powerful) society. "If the community standards are positive but not according to accepted codes of conventional society, behavior will accordingly be contrary to standards of the larger society."<sup>29</sup>

Obviously, if "deviant behavior" is simply *behavior* frowned upon by outsiders and not by insiders, it is unnecessary to posit any special motivational force or strain to account for it. A person simply learns to become a "criminal" in much the same way he

<sup>27</sup> Nye, *Family Relationships*, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Scott Briar and Irving Piliavin, "Delinquency, Situational Inducements, and Commitment to Conformity," *Social Problems*, XIII (1965), 45.

<sup>29</sup> Clifford R. Shaw et al., *Delinquency Areas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), p. 6.

learns to play a violin or develops a taste for peanut butter. "A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law."<sup>30</sup>

The cultural deviance theorist rejects a fundamental assumption of strain theory. But, since he has no language with which to express his rejection, the cultural deviance theorist attacks this assumption indirectly. Edwin H. Sutherland has written: "The attempts by many scholars to explain criminal behavior by general drives and values, such as . . . striving for social status, [and] the money motive . . . , have been and must continue to be futile since they explain lawful behavior as completely as they explain criminal behavior."<sup>31</sup> The strain theorist would grant that values common to all men cannot directly explain the criminal actions of some of them. These common values take on significance within his theory because he assumes that all men are not equally capable of realizing them. They are irrelevant to the cultural deviance theorist because he has no way of describing failure to attain them. In his world, failure and frustration have no place.<sup>32</sup>

The control theory assumption that crime is an amoral act is dismissed by the cultural deviance theorist as middle-class nonsense. In fact, since "criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons," principally "within intimate personal groups,"<sup>33</sup> the idea implicit in control theory that the criminal is cut off from his fellows is explicitly repudiated. Indeed, the cultural deviance theorist often suggests that the delinquent is usually "sociable" and "gregarious."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *The Sutherland Papers*, ed. Albert K. Cohen et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956), p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Sutherland and Cressey, *Principles of Criminology*, p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> For what to my mind is a truly devastating critique of theories of cultural deviance, see Kornhauser, "Theoretical Issues," Part III. As Kornhauser notes, theories of cultural deviance do not distinguish between culture and social structure. They are thus incapable of making statements about discrepancies between what men desire and what they have, if, in fact, these theories recognize the possibility of such discrepancies. If strain theories assume a moral man, and control theories an amoral man, cultural deviance theories assume a hypermoral man. In a world where sin is impossible, the upright man hardly deserves congratulations, however.

<sup>33</sup> Sutherland and Cressey, *Principles of Criminology*, p. 81.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82. See also Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*, pp. 105-107. In the end, of course, the criminal ends up just a little more moral than the law-abiding citizen because his actions are based on considerations of social solidarity rather than personal achievement.

### Criticisms of Cultural Deviance Theory

Cultural deviance theory has been heavily criticized,<sup>35</sup> yet it remains one of the most widely used perspectives in research and theory on crime and delinquency.<sup>36</sup> The impact of this criticism is suggested by a recent statement of one of the proponents of the theory: "By comparison with its principal competitors . . . , differential association stands fairly secure."<sup>37</sup> What is the basis of this security?

Perhaps the outstanding event in the intellectual history of theories of cultural deviance was not a decision about the nature of man, but a rather ordinary-appearing decision about the nature of scientific explanation: "I reached the general conclusion that a concrete condition cannot be a cause of crime, and that the only way to get a causal explanation of criminal behavior is by abstracting from the varying concrete conditions things which are universally associated with crime."<sup>38</sup> Sutherland decided that every case

<sup>35</sup> For a list of criticisms of differential association (which, by someone else's count, contains seventy items) and a reply to these criticisms, see Donald R. Cressey, "Epidemiology and Individual Conduct: A Case from Criminology," *The Pacific Sociological Review*, III (1960), 37-54.

<sup>36</sup> Of the theoretical works cited previously, Cohen's *Delinquent Boys* and Gloward and Ohlin's *Delinquency and Opportunity* are heavily influenced by the cultural deviance perspective. Several attempts to refine Sutherland's theory have appeared. For a good example, see Robert L. Burgess and Ronald L. Akers, "A Differential Association-Reinforcement Theory of Criminal Behavior," *Social Problems*, XIV (1966), 128-147. Research on differential association has been mainly concerned with such things as relating the number of delinquent friends to delinquency—see, for example, Harwin L. Voss, "Differential Association and Delinquent Behavior: A Replication," *Social Problems*, XII (1964), 78-85.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Glaser, "The Differential-Association Theory of Crime," *Human Behavior and Social Processes*, ed. Arnold M. Rose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p. 439. The competitors in this case are "the multiple factor theory" and "absence-of-control theories analogous to the psychoanalytic model." The multiple factor approach is a favorite whipping boy of cultural deviance theorists, even though there should be no inconsistency between the two approaches. In his discussion Glaser grants control theories the ability to explain such things as "temper tantrums."

<sup>38</sup> *The Sutherland Papers*, p. 19. Hanan C. Selvin and I have shown that the view that "only concepts can be causes" leads to misinterpretation of empirical results and ultimately to the view that the quest for causes is futile. We would not argue that the solution is to treat indicators as causal explanations of crime. The issue is generated by confusion concerning the relation between facts and theory. Thus, for example, Sutherland's statement should read: I realized that while concrete conditions are the causes of crime, the only way to get a causal explanation of crime is by abstracting from the vary-

of crime should be explained by the theory he proposed to construct; he thus appears to have relied upon the well-known method of analytic induction.<sup>39</sup>

Analytic induction proceeds by reformulating the hypothesis and/or redefining the phenomenon to be explained each time a deviant case is encountered. The ability to redefine the phenomenon may trick the user of analytic induction into merely defining that which he was to have explained.<sup>40</sup> Yet, to my knowledge, Sutherland never felt called upon to redefine crime. Crime began and remained simply "violation of the law." Instead, he reformulated his hypotheses until they were compatible with all known facts about crime. Hypotheses encompassing the cannibalism of the Donner Party, the murder of one newspaper editor by another, and a slum boy stealing a bike, are of necessity highly abstract. Given the inferential distance between the concepts of such hypotheses and concrete events, it is not surprising that the theory of

ing concrete conditions things that are universally associated with crime. See our *Delinquency Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), pp. 130-133, 177-183.

<sup>39</sup> Sutherland acknowledges the influence of Lindesmith, one of the first users of analytic induction (*The Sutherland Papers*, pp. 17-18). The paper most frequently cited by users of this method is by Ralph H. Turner, "The Quest for Universals in Sociological Research," *American Sociological Review*, XVIII (1953), 604-611. Although users of analytic induction have been invariably contemptuous of quantitative—that is, probabilistic—research, Turner does not see the two as incompatible or antithetical. He argues, in fact, that by themselves theories derived from analytic induction are inadequate.

<sup>40</sup> Thus Becker summarizes the results of his study of marihuana use with a series of tautologies, undoubtedly produced by his emendation of "marihuana use" to "marihuana use for pleasure." He says, for example: "A person, then, cannot begin to use marihuana for pleasure, or continue its use for pleasure, unless he learns to define its effects as enjoyable, unless it becomes and remains an object he conceives as capable of producing pleasure." (Becker says at the beginning of his paper that the qualifier "for pleasure" was added to emphasize that the use of marihuana does not produce addiction, that it is "noncompulsive and casual," and to eliminate "those few cases in which marihuana is used for its prestige value only." Becker thus suggests that neither the hypothesis nor the definition was altered by research. Such an hypothesis, it should be pointed out, could not conceivably be altered by research, whether or not the substance involved was addictive.) Becker's "research finding" is true. There is no way to dispute such a statement on empirical grounds. Is the statement also useful? Does it allow us to predict that jazz musicians or truck drivers would be more likely to use marihuana? Does it help us make sense of what we observe in the world? Suppose it were found that jazz musicians are more likely than truck drivers to use marihuana for pleasure. Would it help in understanding this difference to know that those who use marihuana for pleasure enjoy it? See *Outsiders*, pp. 41-58.

differential association is virtually nonfalsifiable. (It is also not surprising that empirical predictions derived from the theory tend to be trivial.)<sup>41</sup>

Once the meanings of the concepts in Sutherland's theory are to some extent specified, the issue immediately shifts from one of falsifiability to one of truth or falsity. For example, if the "definitions favorable to violation of law" upon which the theory rests are taken to be definitions that *free* the actor to commit delinquent acts, the theory is falsifiable (and the distinction between Sutherland's theory and social control theory is easily lost).<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, if the definitions favorable to violation of law are taken to be definitions that *require* delinquent behavior, the theory is again falsifiable (and, according to many critics and researchers, false).<sup>43</sup>

Because of the generality and complexity of cultural deviance theories, I hesitate to assert either that they are inconsistent with control theory or that they are in general false.<sup>44</sup> It is clear, however, that predictions derived from control theory will differ markedly from those deriving from particular cultural deviance theories. I shall therefore examine these cases in some detail and return to a general comparison of control and cultural deviance theory only after the analysis is essentially complete.

<sup>41</sup> Glaser shows that one can derive from the theory of differential association such predictions as: residence in a high delinquency area will be associated with arrest rates (*Human Behavior*, ed. Rose, pp. 434-435).

<sup>42</sup> Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza, "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency," *American Sociological Review*, XXII (1957), 664-670. See also Burgess and Akers, "A Differential Association-Reinforcement Theory," pp. 142-143.

<sup>43</sup> James F. Short, Jr., and Fred L. Strodtbeck, *Group Process and Gang Delinquency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), Chapter 3; Komhauser, "Theoretical Issues," Part III, pp. 36-51.

<sup>44</sup> My timidity with respect to the evidence against cultural deviance theories or no difference from one group to another with respect to crime-related values also show variation within the groups. Certainly the first fact requires modification, perhaps fatal modification, of cultural deviance theories. At the same time, it is difficult to conceive of the values measured being unrelated to crime at the individual level. If they are related, the arguments against cultural deviance theory are not as compelling as its critics take them to be. And criminological research has for too long based its theories on ecological data.

# A Control Theory of Delinquency

"The more weakened the groups to which [the individual] belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognizes no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his private interests."<sup>1</sup>

Control theories assume that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken. Since these theories embrace two highly complex concepts, the *bond* of the individual to society, it is not surprising that they have at one time or another formed the basis of explanations of most forms of aberrant or unusual behavior. It is also not surprising that control theories have described the elements of the bond to society in many ways, and that they have focused on a variety of units as the point of control.

I begin with a classification and description of the elements of the bond to conventional society. I try to show how each of these elements is related to delinquent behavior and how they are related to each other. I then turn to the question of specifying the unit to which the person is presumably more or less tied, and to the question of the adequacy of the motivational force built into the explanation of delinquent behavior.

## Elements of the Bond

### Attachment

In explaining conforming behavior, sociologists justly emphasize sensitivity to the opinion of others.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, as sug-

<sup>1</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1951), p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> Books have been written on the increasing importance of interpersonal sensitivity in modern life. According to this view, controls from within have become less important than controls from without in producing conformity. Whether or not this observation is true as a description of historical trends, it is true that interpersonal sensitivity has become more important in explain-

gested in the preceding chapter, they tend to suggest that man is sensitive to the opinion of others and thus exclude sensitivity from their explanations of deviant behavior. In explaining deviant behavior, psychologists, in contrast, emphasize insensitivity to the opinion of others.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, they too tend to ignore variation, and, in addition, they tend to tie sensitivity inextricably to other variables, to make it part of a syndrome or "type," and thus seriously to reduce its value as an explanatory concept. The psychopath is characterized only in part by "deficient attachment to or affection for others, a failure to respond to the ordinary motivations founded in respect or regard for one's fellows";<sup>4</sup> he is also characterized by such things as "excessive aggressiveness," "lack of superego control," and "an infantile level of response."<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, too, the behavior that psychopathy is used to explain often becomes part of the *definition* of psychopathy. As a result, in Barbara Wootton's words: "[The psychopath] is . . . *par excellence*, and without shame or qualification, the model of the circular process by which mental abnormality is inferred from anti-social behavior while anti-social behavior is explained by mental abnormality."<sup>6</sup>

The problems of diagnosis, tautology, and name-calling are avoided if the dimensions of psychopathy are treated as causally and therefore problematically interrelated, rather than as logically and therefore necessarily bound to each other. In fact, it can be argued that all of the characteristics attributed to the psychopath follow from, are effects of, his lack of attachment to others. To say

ing conformity. Although logically it should also have become more important in explaining nonconformity, the opposite has been the case, once again showing that Cohen's observation that an explanation of conformity should be an explanation of deviance cannot be translated as "an explanation of conformity has to be an explanation of deviance." For the view that interpersonal sensitivity currently plays a greater role than formerly in producing conformity, see William J. Goode, "Norm Commitment and Conformity to Role-Status Obligations," *American Journal of Sociology*, LXVI (1960), 246-258. And, of course, also see David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1950), especially Part I.

<sup>3</sup> The literature on psychopathy is voluminous. See William McCord and Joan McCord, *The Psychopath* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> John M. Martin and Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *Delinquent Behavior* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* For additional properties of the psychopath, see McCord and McCord, *The Psychopath*, pp. 1-22.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Wootton, *Social Science and Social Pathology* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 250.



that to lack attachment to others is to be free from moral restraints is to use lack of attachment to explain the guiltlessness of the psychopath, the fact that he apparently has no conscience or superego. In this view, lack of attachment to others is not merely a symptom of psychopathy, it is psychopathy; lack of conscience is just another way of saying the same thing; and the violation of norms is (or may be) a consequence.

For that matter, given that man is an animal, "impulsivity" and "aggressiveness" can also be seen as natural consequences of freedom from moral restraints. However, since the view of man as endowed with natural propensities and capacities like other animals is peculiarly unpalatable to sociologists, we need not fall back on such a view to explain the amoral man's aggressiveness.<sup>7</sup> The process of becoming alienated from others often involves or is based on active interpersonal conflict. Such conflict could easily supply a reservoir of *socially derived* hostility sufficient to account for the aggressiveness of those whose attachments to others have been weakened.

Durkheim said it many years ago: "We are moral beings to the extent that we are social beings."<sup>8</sup> This may be interpreted to mean that we are moral beings to the extent that we have "internalized the norms" of society. But what does it mean to say that a person has internalized the norms of society? The norms of society are by definition shared by the members of society. To violate a norm is, therefore, to act contrary to the wishes and expectations of other people. If a person does not care about the wishes and expectations of other people—that is, if he is insensitive to the opinion of others—then he is to that extent not bound by the norms. He is free to deviate.

The essence of internalization of norms, conscience, or superego thus lies in the attachment of the individual to others.<sup>9</sup> This

<sup>7</sup> "The logical untenability [of the position that there are forces in man 'resistant to socialization'] was ably demonstrated by Parsons over 30 years ago, and it is widely recognized that the position is empirically unsound because it assumes [!] some universal biological drive system distinctly separate from socialization and social context—a basic and intransigent human nature" (Judith Blake and Kingsley Davis, "Norms, Values, and Sanctions," *Handbook of Modern Sociology*, ed. Robert E. L. Faris [Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964], p. 471).

<sup>8</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Moral Education*, trans. Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schnurer (New York: The Free Press, 1961), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> Although attachment alone does not exhaust the meaning of internaliza-

view has several advantages over the concept of internalization. For one, explanations of deviant behavior based on attachment do not beg the question, since the extent to which a person is attached to others can be measured independently of his deviant behavior. Furthermore, change or variation in behavior is explainable in a way that it is not when notions of internalization or superego are used. For example, the divorced man is more likely after divorce to commit a number of deviant acts, such as suicide or forgery. If we explain these acts by reference to the superego (or internal control), we are forced to say that the man "lost his conscience" when he got a divorce; and, of course, if he remarries, we have to conclude that he gets his conscience back.

This dimension of the bond to conventional society is encountered in most social control-oriented research and theory. F. Ivan Nye's "internal control" and "indirect control" refer to the same element, although we avoid the problem of explaining changes over time by locating the "conscience" in the bond to others rather than making it part of the personality.<sup>10</sup> Attachment to others is just one aspect of Albert J. Reiss's "personal controls"; we avoid his problems of tautological empirical observations by making the relationship between attachment and delinquency problematic rather than definitional.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Scott Briar and Irving Piliavin's "commitment" or "stake in conformity" assumes attachment, as their discussion illustrates, although the terms they use are more closely associated with the next element to be discussed.<sup>12</sup>

tion, attachments and beliefs combined would appear to leave only a small residue of "internal control" not susceptible in principle to direct measurement.

<sup>10</sup> F. Ivan Nye, *Family Relationships and Delinquent Behavior* (New York: Wiley, 1958), pp. 5-7.

<sup>11</sup> Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "Delinquency as the Failure of Personal and Social Controls," *American Sociological Review*, XVI (1951), 196-207. For example, "Our observations show . . . that delinquent recidivists are less often persons with mature ego ideals or nondelinquent social roles" (p. 204).

<sup>12</sup> Scott Briar and Irving Piliavin, "Delinquency, Situational Inducements, and Commitment to Conformity," *Social Problems*, XIII (1965), 41-42. The concept "stake in conformity" was introduced by Jackson Toby in his "Social Disorganization and Stake in Conformity: Complementary Factors in the Predatory Behavior of Hoodlums," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, XLVIII (1957), 12-17. See also his "Hoodlum or Business Man: An American Dilemma," *The Jews*, ed. Marshall Sklare (New York: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 542-550. Throughout the text, I occasionally use "stake in conformity" in speaking in general of the strength of the

## Commitment

"Of all passions, that which inclineth men least to break the laws, is fear. Nay, excepting some generous natures, it is the only thing, when there is the appearance of profit or pleasure by breaking the laws, that makes men keep them."<sup>13</sup> Few would deny that men on occasion obey the rules simply from fear of the consequences. This rational component in conformity we label commitment. What does it mean to say that a person is committed to conformity? In Howard S. Becker's formulation it means the following:

First, the individual is in a position in which his decision with regard to some particular line of action has consequences for other interests and activities not necessarily [directly] related to it. Second, he has placed himself in that position by his own prior actions. A third element is present though so obvious as not to be apparent: the committed person must be aware [of these other interests] and must recognize that his decision in this case will have ramifications beyond it.<sup>14</sup>

The idea, then, is that the person invests time, energy, himself, in a certain line of activity—say, getting an education, building up a business, acquiring a reputation for virtue. When or whenever he considers deviant behavior, he must consider the costs of this deviant behavior, the risk he runs of losing the investment he has made in conventional behavior.

If attachment to others is the sociological counterpart of the superego or conscience, commitment is the counterpart of the ego or common sense. To the person committed to conventional lines of action, risking one to ten years in prison for a ten-dollar holdup is stupidity, because to the committed person the costs and risks obviously exceed ten dollars in value. (To the psychoanalyst, such an act exhibits failure to be governed by the "reality-principle.") In the sociological control theory, it can be and is generally assumed that the decision to commit a criminal act may well be rationally determined—that the actor's decision was not irrational bond to conventional society. So used, the concept is somewhat broader than is true for either Toby or Briar and Pillavin, where the concept is roughly equivalent to what is here called "commitment."

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. 195.

<sup>14</sup> Howard S. Becker, "Notes on the Concept of Commitment," *American Journal of Sociology* LVII (1952), p. 22.

given the risks and costs he faces. Of course, as Becker points out, if the actor is capable of in some sense calculating the costs of a line of action, he is also capable of calculational errors: ignorance and error return, in the control theory, as possible explanations of deviant behavior.

The concept of commitment assumes that the organization of society is such that the interests of most persons would be endangered if they were to engage in criminal acts. Most people, simply by the process of living in an organized society, acquire goods, reputations, prospects that they do not want to risk losing. These accumulations are society's insurance that they will abide by the rules. Many hypotheses about the antecedents of delinquent behavior are based on this premise. For example, Arthur L. Stinchcombe's hypothesis that "high school rebellion . . . occurs when future status is not clearly related to present performance" <sup>15</sup> suggests that one is committed to conformity not only by what one has but also by what one hopes to obtain. Thus "ambition" and/or "aspiration" play an important role in producing conformity. The person becomes committed to a conventional line of action, and he is therefore committed to conformity.

Most lines of action in a society are of course conventional. The clearest examples are educational and occupational careers. Actions thought to jeopardize one's chances in these areas are presumably avoided. Interestingly enough, even nonconventional commitments may operate to produce conventional conformity. We are told, at least, that boys aspiring to careers in the rackets or professional thievery are judged by their "honesty" and "reliability"—traits traditionally in demand among seekers of office boys.<sup>16</sup>

## Involvement

Many persons undoubtedly owe a life of virtue to a lack of opportunity to do otherwise. Time and energy are inherently limited: "Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat

<sup>15</sup> Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Rebellion in a High School* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1964), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), p. 147, quoting Edwin H. Sutherland, ed., *The Professional Thief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), pp. 211-213.

and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a bon vivant, and a lady killer, as well as a philosopher, a philanthropist, a statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a 'tone-poet' and saint. But the thing is simply impossible."<sup>17</sup> The things that William James here says he would like to be or do are all, I suppose, within the realm of conventionality, but if he were to include illicit actions he would still have to eliminate some of them as simply impossible.

Involvement or engrossment in conventional activities is thus often part of a control theory. The assumption, widely shared, is that a person may be simply too busy doing conventional things to find time to engage in deviant behavior. The person involved in conventional activities is tied to appointments, deadlines, working hours, plans, and the like, so the opportunity to commit deviant acts rarely arises. To the extent that he is engrossed in conventional activities, he cannot even think about deviant acts, let alone act out his inclinations.<sup>18</sup>

This line of reasoning is responsible for the stress placed on recreational facilities in many programs to reduce delinquency, for much of the concern with the high school dropout, and for the idea that boys should be drafted into the Army to keep them out of trouble. So obvious and persuasive is the idea that involvement in conventional activities is a major deterrent to delinquency that it was accepted even by Sutherland: "In the general area of juvenile delinquency it is probable that the most significant difference between juveniles who engage in delinquency and those who do not is that the latter are provided abundant opportunities of a conventional type for satisfying their recreational interests, while the former lack those opportunities or facilities."<sup>19</sup>

The view that "idle hands are the devil's workshop" has received more sophisticated treatment in recent sociological writings on delinquency. David Matza and Gresham M. Sykes, for example, suggest that delinquents have the values of a leisure class, the same values ascribed by Veblen to *the* leisure class: a search for

<sup>17</sup> William James, *Psychology* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1948), p. 186.

<sup>18</sup> Few activities appear to be so engrossing that they rule out contemplation of alternative lines of behavior, at least if estimates of the amount of time men spend plotting sexual deviations have any validity.

<sup>19</sup> The Sutherland Papers, ed. Albert K. Cohen et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956), p. 37.

kicks, disdain of work, a desire for the big score, and acceptance of aggressive toughness as proof of masculinity.<sup>20</sup> Matza and Sykes explain delinquency by reference to this system of values, but they note that adolescents at all class levels are "to some extent" members of a leisure class, that they "move in a limbo between earlier parental domination and future integration with the social structure through the bonds of work and marriage."<sup>21</sup> In the end, then, the leisure of the adolescent produces a set of values, which, in turn, leads to delinquency.

### Belief

Unlike the cultural deviance theory, the control theory assumes the existence of a common value system within the society or group whose norms are being violated. If the deviant is committed to a value system different from that of conventional society, there is, within the context of the theory, nothing to explain. The question is, "Why does a man violate the rules in which he believes?" It is not, "Why do men differ in their beliefs about what constitutes good and desirable conduct?" The person is assumed to have been socialized (perhaps imperfectly) into the group whose rules he is violating; deviance is not a question of one group imposing its rules on the members of another group. In other words, we not only assume the deviant *has* believed the rules, we assume he believes the rules even as he violates them.

How can a person believe it is wrong to steal at the same time he is stealing? In the strain theory, this is not a difficult problem. (In fact, as suggested in the previous chapter, the strain theory was devised specifically to deal with this question.) The motivation to deviance adduced by the strain theorist is so strong that we can well understand the deviant act even assuming the deviator believes strongly that it is wrong.<sup>22</sup> However, given the control theory's assumptions about motivation, if both the deviant and the

<sup>20</sup> David Matza and Gresham M. Sykes, "Juvenile Delinquency and Subterranean Values," *American Sociological Review*, XXVI (1961), 712-719.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 718.

<sup>22</sup> The starving man stealing the loaf of bread is the image evoked by most strain-theories. In this image, the starving man's belief in the wrongness of his act is clearly not something that must be explained away. It can be assumed to be present without causing embarrassment to the explanation.

nondeviant believe the deviant act is wrong, how do we account for the fact that one commits it and the other does not?

Control theories have taken two approaches to this problem. In one approach, beliefs are treated as mere words that mean little or nothing if the other forms of control are missing. "Semantic dementia," the dissociation between rational faculties and emotional control which is said to be characteristic of the psychopath, illustrates this way of handling the problem.<sup>23</sup> In short, beliefs, at least insofar as they are expressed in words, drop out of the picture; since they do not differentiate between deviants and nondeviants, they are in the same class as "language" or any other characteristic common to all members of the group. Since they represent no real obstacle to the commission of delinquent acts, nothing need be said about how they are handled by those committing such acts. The control theories that do not mention beliefs (or values), and many do not, may be assumed to take this approach to the problem.

The second approach argues that the deviant rationalizes his behavior so that he can at once violate the rule and maintain his belief in it. Donald R. Cressey has advanced this argument with respect to embezzlement,<sup>24</sup> and Sykes and Matza have advanced it with respect to delinquency.<sup>25</sup> In both Cressey's and Sykes and Matza's treatments, these rationalizations (Cressey calls them "verbalizations," Sykes and Matza term them "techniques of neutralization") occur prior to the commission of the deviant act. If the neutralization is successful, the person is free to commit the act(s) in question. Both in Cressey and in Sykes and Matza, the strain that prompts the effort at neutralization also provides the motive force that results in the subsequent deviant act. Their theories are thus, in this sense, strain theories. Neutralization is difficult to handle within the context of a theory that adheres closely to control theory assumptions, because in the control theory there is no special motivational force to account for the neutralization. This difficulty is especially noticeable in Matza's later

<sup>23</sup> McCord and McCord, *The Psychopath*, pp. 12-15.

<sup>24</sup> Donald R. Cressey, *Other People's Money* (New York: The Free Press, 1953).

<sup>25</sup> Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza, "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency," *American Sociological Review*, XXII (1957), 664-670.

treatment of this topic, where the motivational component, the "will to delinquency" appears *after* the moral vacuum has been created by the techniques of neutralization.<sup>26</sup> The question thus becomes: Why neutralize?

In attempting to solve a strain theory problem with control theory tools, the control theorist is thus led into a trap. He cannot answer the crucial question. The concept of neutralization assumes the existence of moral obstacles to the commission of deviant acts. In order plausibly to account for a deviant act, it is necessary to generate motivation to deviance that is at least equivalent in force to the resistance provided by these moral obstacles. However, if the moral obstacles are removed, neutralization and special motivation are no longer required. We therefore follow the implicit logic of control theory and remove these moral obstacles by hypothesis. Many persons do not have an attitude of respect toward the rules of society; many persons feel no moral obligation to conform regardless of personal advantage. Insofar as the values and beliefs of these persons are consistent with their feelings, and there should be a tendency toward consistency, neutralization is unnecessary; it has already occurred.

Does this merely push the question back a step and at the same time produce conflict with the assumption of a common value system? I think not. In the first place, we do not assume, as does Cressey, that neutralization occurs in order to make a specific criminal act possible.<sup>27</sup> We do not assume, as do Sykes and Matza, that neutralization occurs to make many delinquent acts possible. We do not assume, in other words, that the person constructs a system of rationalizations in order to justify commission of acts he *wants* to commit. We assume, in contrast, that the beliefs that free a man to commit deviant acts are *unmotivated* in the sense that he does not construct or adopt them in order to facilitate the attainment of illicit ends. In the second place, we do

<sup>26</sup> David Matza, *Delinquency and Drift* (New York: Wiley, 1964), pp. 181-191.

<sup>27</sup> In asserting that Cressey's assumption is invalid with respect to delinquency, I do not wish to suggest that it is invalid for the question of embezzlement, where the problem faced by the deviator is fairly specific and he can reasonably be assumed to be an upstanding citizen. (Although even here the fact that the embezzler's nonshareable financial problem often results from some sort of hanky-panky suggests that "verbalizations" may be less necessary than might otherwise be assumed.)



not assume, as does Matza, that "delinquents concur in the conventional assessment of delinquency."<sup>28</sup> We assume, in contrast, that there is *variation* in the extent to which people believe they should obey the rules of society, and, furthermore, that the less a person believes he should obey the rules, the more likely he is to violate them.<sup>29</sup>

In chronological order, then, a person's beliefs in the moral validity of norms are, for no teleological reason, weakened. The probability that he will commit delinquent acts is therefore increased. When and if he commits a delinquent act, we may justifiably use the weakness of his beliefs in explaining it, but no special motivation is required to explain either the weakness of his beliefs or, perhaps, his delinquent act.

The keystone of this argument is of course the assumption that there is variation in belief in the moral validity of social rules. This assumption is amenable to direct empirical test and can thus survive at least until its first confrontation with data. For the present, we must return to the idea of a common value system with which this section was begun.

The idea of a common (or, perhaps better, a single) value system is consistent with the fact, or presumption, of variation in the strength of moral beliefs. We have not suggested that delinquency is based on beliefs counter to conventional morality; we have not suggested that delinquents do not believe delinquent acts are wrong. They may well believe these acts are wrong, but the meaning and efficacy of such beliefs are contingent upon other beliefs and, indeed, on the strength of other ties to the conventional order.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Delinquency and Drift*, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> This assumption is not, I think, contradicted by the evidence presented by Matza against the existence of a delinquent subculture. In comparing the attitudes and actions of delinquents with the picture painted by delinquent subculture theorists, Matza emphasizes—and perhaps exaggerates—the extent to which delinquents are tied to the conventional order. In implicitly comparing delinquents with a supermoral man, I emphasize—and perhaps exaggerate—the extent to which they are not tied to the conventional order.

<sup>30</sup> The position taken here is therefore somewhere between the "semantic dementia" and the "neutralization" positions. Assuming variation, the delinquent is, at the extremes, freer than the neutralization argument assumes. Although the possibility of wide discrepancy between what the delinquent professes and what he practices still exists, it is presumably much rarer than is suggested by studies of articulate "psychopaths."

## Relations Among the Elements

In general, the more closely a person is tied to conventional society in any of these ways, the more closely he is likely to be tied in the other ways. The person who is attached to conventional people is, for example, more likely to be involved in conventional activities and to accept conventional notions of desirable conduct. Of the six possible combinations of elements, three seem particularly important and will therefore be discussed in some detail.

### Attachment and Commitment

It is frequently suggested that attachment and commitment (as the terms are used here) tend to vary inversely. Thus, according to delinquency research, one of the lower-class adolescent's "problems" is that he is unable to sever ties to parents and peers, ties that prevent him from devoting sufficient time and energy to educational and occupational aspirations. His attachments are thus seen as getting in the way of conventional commitments.<sup>31</sup> According to stratification research, the lower-class boy who breaks free from these attachments is more likely to be upwardly mobile.<sup>32</sup> Both research traditions thus suggest that those bound to conformity for instrumental reasons are less likely to be bound to conformity by emotional ties to conventional others. If the unattached compensate for lack of attachment by commitment to achievement, and if the uncommitted make up for their lack of commitment by becoming more attached to persons, we could conclude that neither attachment nor commitment will be related to delinquency.

<sup>31</sup> The idea that the middle-class boy is less closely tied than the lower-class boy to his peers has been widely adopted in the literature on delinquency. The middle-class boy's "cold and rational" relations with his peers are in sharp contrast with the "spontaneous and warm" relations of the lower-class boy. See, for example, Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys* (New York: The Free Press, 1955), pp. 102-109.

<sup>32</sup> The evidence in favor of this proposition is summarized in Seymour M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), especially pp. 249-259. For example: "These [business leaders] show strong traits of independence, they are characterized by an inability to form intimate relations and are consequently often socially isolated men" (p. 251).

Although delinquency theory in general has taken a stand on many questions about the relative importance of institutions (for example, that the school is more important than the family), control theory has remained decidedly eclectic, partly because each element of the bond directs attention to different institutions. For these reasons, I shall treat specification of the units of attachment as a problem in the empirical interpretation of control theory, and not attempt at this point to say which should be more or less important.

### Where Is the Motivation?

The most disconcerting question the control theorist faces goes something like this: "Yes, but *why* do they do it?" In the good old days, the control theorist could simply strip away the "vener of civilization" and expose man's "animal impulses" for all to see. These impulses appeared to him (and apparently to his audience) to provide a plausible account of the motivation to crime and delinquency. His argument was *not* that delinquents and criminals alone are animals, but that we are all animals, and thus all naturally capable of committing criminal acts. It took no great study to reveal that children, chickens, and dogs occasionally assault and steal from their fellow creatures; that children, chickens, and dogs also behave for relatively long periods in a perfectly moral manner. Of course the acts of chickens and dogs are not "assault" or "theft," and such behavior is not "moral"; it is simply the behavior of a chicken or a dog. The chicken stealing corn from his neighbor knows nothing of the moral law; he does not *want* to violate rules; he wants merely to eat corn. The dog maliciously destroying a pillow or feloniously assaulting another dog is the moral equal of the chicken. No motivation to deviance is required to explain his acts. So, too, no special motivation to crime within the human animal was required to explain his criminal acts.

Times changed. It was no longer fashionable (within sociology, at least) to refer to animal impulses. The control theorist tended more and more to deemphasize the motivational component of his theory. He might refer in the beginning to "universal human needs," or some such, but the driving force behind crime and delinquency was rarely alluded to. At the same time, his

adults (in life), and that he respects older children and parents.<sup>36</sup>

In short, "respect is the source of law."<sup>37</sup> Insofar as the child respects (loves and fears) his parents, and adults in general, he will accept their rules. Conversely, insofar as this respect is undermined, the rules will tend to lose their obligatory character. It is assumed that belief in the obligatory character of rules will to some extent maintain its efficacy in producing conformity even if the respect which brought it into being no longer exists. It is also assumed that attachment may produce conformity even in the face of beliefs favorable to nonconformity. In short, these two sources of moral behavior, although highly and complexly related, are assumed to have an independent effect that justifies their separation.

### The Bond to What?

Control theorists sometimes suggest that attachment to any object outside one's self, whether it be the home town, the starry heavens, or the family dog, promotes moral behavior.<sup>38</sup> Although it seems obvious that some objects are more important than others and that the important objects must be identified if the elements of the bond are to produce the consequences suggested by the theory, a priori rankings of the objects of attachment have proved peculiarly unsatisfactory. Durkheim, for example, concludes that the three groups to whom attachment is most important in producing morality are the family, the nation, and humanity. He further concludes that, of these, the nation is most important.<sup>39</sup> All of which, given much contemporary thinking on the virtues of patriotism,<sup>40</sup> illustrates rather well the difficulty posed by such questions as: Which is more important in the control of delinquency, the father or the mother, the family or the school?

<sup>36</sup> Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, trans. Marjorie Gabain (New York: The Free Press, n.d.), p. 101.  
<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.  
<sup>38</sup> Durkheim, *Moral Education*, p. 83.  
<sup>40</sup> In the end, Durkheim distinguishes between a patriotism that leads to concern for domestic problems and one that emphasizes foreign relations (especially that variety which puts "national sentiment in conflict with commitments of mankind").

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explanations of crime and delinquency increasingly left the reader uneasy. What, the reader asked, is the control theorist assuming? Albert K. Cohen and James F. Short answer the question this way:

... it is important to point out one important limitation of both types of theory. They [culture conflict and social disorganization theories] are both control theories in the sense that they explain delinquency in terms of the absence of effective controls. They appear, therefore, to imply a model of motivation that assumes that the impulse to delinquency is an inherent characteristic of young people and does not itself need to be explained; it is something that erupts when the lid—i.e., internalized cultural restraints or external authority—is off.<sup>41</sup>

There are several possible and I think reasonable reactions to this criticism. One reaction is simply to acknowledge the assumption, to grant that one is assuming what control theorists have always assumed about the motivation to crime—that it is constant across persons (at least within the system in question): "There is no reason to assume that only those who finally commit a deviant act usually have the impulse to do so. It is much more likely that most people experience deviant impulses frequently. At least in fantasy, people are much more deviant than they appear."<sup>42</sup> There is certainly nothing wrong with making such an assumption. We are free to assume anything we wish to assume; the truth of our theory is presumably subject to empirical test.<sup>43</sup>

A second reaction, involving perhaps something of a quibble, is to defend the logic of control theory and to deny the alleged assumption. We can say the fact that control theory suggests the absence of something causes delinquency is not a proper criticism, since negative relations have as much claim to scientific acceptability as do positive relations.<sup>44</sup> We can also say that the present

<sup>41</sup> See their "Juvenile Delinquency," in *Contemporary Social Problems*, ed. Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), p. 106.

<sup>42</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), p. 26.

See also Kate Friedlander, *The Psycho-Analytic Approach to Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: International Universities Press, 1947), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Albert K. Cohen, *Deviance and Control* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.): Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 59-62.

<sup>44</sup> I have frequently heard the statement "it's an absence of something explanation" used as an apparently damning criticism of a sociological theory.

theory does not impute an inherent impulse to delinquency to anyone.<sup>45</sup> That, on the contrary, it denies the necessity of such an imputation: "The desires, and other passions of man, are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions, that proceed from those passions, till they know a law that forbids them."<sup>46</sup>

A third reaction is to accept the criticism as valid, to grant that a complete explanation of delinquency would provide the necessary impetus, and proceed to construct an explanation of motivation consistent with control theory. Briar and Piliavin provide situational motivation: "We assume these acts are prompted by short-term situationally induced desires experienced by all boys to obtain valued goods, to portray courage in the presence of, or be loyal to peers, to strike out at someone who is disliked, or simply to 'get kicks.'"<sup>47</sup> Matza, too, agrees that delinquency cannot be explained simply by removal of controls:

Delinquency is only epiphenomenally action. . . . [It] is essentially infraction. It is rule-breaking behavior performed by juveniles aware that they are violating the law and of the nature of their deed, and made permissible by the neutralization of infractious [i] elements. Thus, Cohen and Short are fundamentally right when they insist that social control theory is incor-

While the origins of this view are unknown to me, the fact that such a statement appears to have some claim to plausibility suggests one of the sources of uneasiness in the face of a control theory.

<sup>45</sup> The popular "it's-an-id-argument," dismissal of explanations of deviant behavior assumes that the founding fathers of sociology somehow proved that the blood of man is neither warm nor red, but spiritual. The intellectual trap springs shut on the counterassumption that innate aggressive-destructive impulses course through the veins, as it should. The solution is not to accept both views, but to accept neither.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 83. Given the history of the sociological response to Hobbes, it is instructive to compare Hobbes' picture of the motivation behind the deviant act with that painted by Talcott Parsons. According to Parsons, the motive to deviate is a psychological trait or need that the deviant carries with him at all times. This need is itself deviant: it cannot be satisfied by conformity. Social controls enter merely as reality factors that determine the form and manner in which this need will be satisfied. If one path to deviant behavior is blocked, the deviant will continue searching until he finds a path that is open. Perhaps because this need arises from interpersonal conflict, and is thus socially derived, the image it presents of the deviant as fundamentally immoral, as doing evil because it is evil, has been largely ignored by those objecting to the control theorist's tendency to fall back on natural propensities as a source of the energy that results in the activities society defines as wrong. See Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: The Free Press, 1951), Chapter 7.

<sup>47</sup> Briar and Piliavin, "Situational Inducements," p. 36.

plete unless it provides an impetus by which the potential for delinquency may be realized.<sup>48</sup>

The impetus Matza provides is a "feeling of desperation," brought on by the "mood of fatalism," "the experience of seeing one's self as effect" rather than cause. In a situation in which manliness is stressed, being pushed around leads to the mood of fatalism, the boy which in turn produces a sense of desperation. In order to relieve his desperation, in order to cast off the mood of fatalism, the boy "makes things happen"—he commits delinquent acts.<sup>49</sup>

There are several additional accounts of "why they do it" that are to my mind persuasive and at the same time generally compatible with control theory.<sup>50</sup> But while all of these accounts may be compatible with control theory, they are by no means deducible from it. Furthermore, they rarely impute built-in, unusual motivation to the delinquent: he is attempting to satisfy the same desires, he is reacting to the same pressures as other boys (as is clear, for example, in the previous quotation from Briar and Piliavin). In other words, if included, these accounts of motivation would serve the same function in the theory that "animal impulses" traditionally served: they might add to its persuasiveness and plausibility, but they would add little else, since they do not differentiate delinquents from nondelinquents.

In the end, then, control theory remains what it has always been: a theory in which deviation is not problematic. The question "Why do they do it?" is simply not the question the theory is designed to answer. The question is, "Why don't we do it?" There is much evidence that we would if we dared.

<sup>48</sup> Delinquency and Drift, p. 182.

<sup>49</sup> Matza warns us that we cannot take the fatalistic mood out of context and hope to find important differences between delinquents and other boys: "That the subcultural delinquent is not significantly different from other boys is precisely the point" (*ibid.*, p. 89).

<sup>50</sup> For example: Carl Werthman, "The Function of Social Definitions in the Development of Delinquent Careers," *Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime*, Report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (Washington: USGPO, 1967), pp. 155-170; Jackson Toby, "Affluence and Adolescent Crime," *ibid.*, pp. 132-144; James F. Short, Jr., and Fred L. Strodbeck, *Group Process and Gang Delinquency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 248-264.

## Chapter III

# The Sample and the Data

Western Contra Costa County is part of the San Francisco-Oakland metropolitan area, bounded on the south by Berkeley and on the west and north by San Francisco and San Pablo bays. In the hills to the east live professionals and executives who commute to Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, and the major city in the western part of the county, Richmond. The flatland between the hills and the bay is populated predominantly by manual workers and, since the beginning of World War II, by a Negro population that has grown from less than 1 to more than 12 percent.<sup>1</sup>

## The Sample

The sample on which the present study is based was drawn as part of the Richmond Youth Project from the 17,500 students entering the eleven public junior and senior high schools of this area in the fall of 1964.<sup>2</sup> This population was stratified by race, sex, school, and grade, producing 130 subgroups, such as seventh-grade non-Negro boys at Granada Junior High School and tenth-grade Negro girls at Richmond High School. In most cases, 85 percent of the Negro boys, 60 percent of the Negro girls, 30 percent of the non-Negro (largely Caucasian but with some Oriental and Mexican-American) boys, and 12 percent of the non-Negro girls were selected randomly for inclusion in the sample.<sup>3</sup> In a few

<sup>1</sup> Alan B. Wilson, "Western Contra Costa County Population, 1965: Demographic Characteristics," mimeographed, Survey Research Center, Berkeley, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Sampling procedures are described in greater detail in Alan B. Wilson, Travis Hirschi, and Glen Elder, "Technical Report No. 1: Secondary School Survey," mimeographed, Survey Research Center, Berkeley, 1965, pp. 3-21. The account presented here depends heavily on this source.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this chapter, I refer to "non-Negro" students and to girls. In the analysis which follows, "non-Negro" becomes "white," and the girls disappear. Subsequent reference to "white" boys is accurate, because the few Oriental and Mexican-American boys were removed from the non-Negro category. Since girls have been neglected for too long by students of delin-