

**Why the Social Bond Theory is the Least Compelling of the Three Criminology Control
Theories**

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The containment, social bond, and desistance theories are three academic theories that explain what deters people from engaging in criminal activity and account for what motivates people to break the law. In a nutshell, the containment theory explains that there are certain “safeguards” that deter individuals from committing crimes; these include things like frustration tolerance and one’s conscience (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). The social bond theory states that emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms deter people from committing crimes (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). And finally, the desistance theory explains what factors stop criminal offenders from committing crimes (Laub & Sampson, 2001). Of the three theories, the one I find least compelling is the social bond theory because emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms are insufficient to deter people from engaging in criminal activity.

The containment theory is more compelling than the social bond theory because inner psychological processes deter people from engaging in criminal activity more than emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms and because environmental pressures motivate people to break the law more than lack of emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms. Walter Reckless’ containment theory states that there are

“personal and social safeguards” which “shield” individuals from committing criminal and delinquent acts (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). These personal and social safeguards include effective supervision and discipline, institutional reinforcement of norms, a consistent moral front to the person, opportunities for acceptance and belongingness, and “inner psychological processes” such as frustration tolerance, temptation resistance, one’s conscience, learning from experience, and incorporation of parental values (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Additionally, the containment theory accounts for what motivates people to break the law by stating that “environmental conditions” can steer individuals towards deviancy (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). These environmental conditions may include poverty, conflict, minority group status, subcultures, frustrations, feelings of restlessness, limited access to success in an opportunity structure, and mental illness (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Inner psychological processes such as low frustration tolerance, low temptation resistance, and lack of conscience often steer individuals to commit crimes. After all, these factors translate into high impulsivity, which goes hand-in-hand with crime. So, it makes sense that inner psychological processes such as frustration tolerance, temptation resistance, and conscience, which translate into calm and sensible behavior, prevent one from engaging in criminal behavior. In contrast, things like emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms are insufficient to deter individuals from committing criminal acts. After all, we’ve all heard of celebrities, professional athletes, college-educated professionals, and religious leaders (e.g. David Westerfield, OJ Simpson, etc.) committing criminal acts at one time or another. And so, in that way, the containment theory is more compelling than the social bond theory because inner psychological processes deter people from engaging in criminal activity more than emotional

attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms and because environmental pressures motivate people to break the law more than lack of attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms.

The social bond theory is the least compelling of the three control theories because emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms are insufficient to deter individuals from engaging in criminal acts. Travis Hirschi's social bond theory states that attachment, commitment to conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms deter people from committing in criminal activity (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). To expound on that, the theory explains that to the extent that individuals are emotionally attached to others, they will be concerned about others' opinions of them, and they will therefore be less likely to engage in deviance for fear of losing others' respect and affection (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). The theory also explains that to the extent that individuals hold conventional goals, they will be less likely to commit crimes (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). After all, commitment to conventional goals, such as educational or occupational goals, often make individuals reluctant to risk losing the chance to achieve these goals (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Committing crimes involves such a risk if the behavior comes to the attention of authorities, law enforcement, and so on (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Additionally, the theory explains, if one has invested several years in acquiring a good reputation or a well-paying job, one will be less likely to engage in behaviors that could jeopardize that reputation or job (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). The theory also states that to the extent that one's time is consumed by

conventional activities, one will be less likely to engage in criminal behavior (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). The logic behind this is that when one spends a great deal of time in conventional activities like schoolwork, sports, hobbies, or a job, there is no time left over to commit crimes (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). The last element of the social bond theory explains that to the extent that one believes in conventional norms, the less likely they will be to deviate from them and commit crimes (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). By the same token, the social bond theory accounts for what motivates individuals to commit crimes via lack of emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in conventional norms (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). For instance, if we lack emotional attachment to society or members of that society, we are not bound by the rules of that society, and we are free to act according to our own self-interest, which often leads us to commit crimes (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). If we lack conventional goals, we may seek to make a living in unscrupulous ways (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). If our time is not occupied by conventional activities, we have more time to commit crimes; as the old saying goes, “idle hands are the devil’s workshop” (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). And if we regard the moral validity of norms with less reverence, we are less inclined to follow conventional norms (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). The problem is, emotional attachment to others is insufficient to discourage individuals from committing crimes. In fact, in many instances, emotional attachment to others can be a catalyst to engage in criminal activity, particularly if one has friends, family, or neighbors involved in crime. Also, conventional goals aren’t enough to steer someone away from crime. Many people resort to unscrupulous means to achieve their conventional goals; for instance, prostituting oneself or selling drugs to pay for college, lying on a resume to get a job, or engaging in white-collar crime to get a promotion at work. Also,

involvement in conventional activities doesn't impede a person from committing crimes. Many celebrities and professional athletes who have their schedules filled from sunrise to sunset with conventional activities still find the time to get involved in crimes. Also, belief in conventional norms. Many politicians who outwardly embrace family values as well as members of the clergy get publicly exposed as guilty of crimes such as child molestation, among others. And so, in that way, the social bond theory is the least compelling of the three control theories because emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms are insufficient to deter individuals from engaging in criminal acts.

The desistance theory is more compelling than the social bond theory because factors that lead to desistance are more effective in deterring individuals from committing crimes than emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms. The desistance theory seeks to explain what stops criminal offenders from committing crimes (Laub & Sampson, 2001). According to the theory, the "best single predictor" of the onset, continuation, and desistance of delinquency is differential association with law-violating and norm-violating peers (Laub & Sampson, 2001). Other "key elements" that lead to desistance according to the theory include aging, a good marriage, job stability, and deciding to "go straight", which often involves a "reorientation of the costs and benefits of crime" (Laub & Sampson, 2001). Furthermore, the desistance theory accounts for what motivates people to break the law via not differentiating associations with law-violating and norm-violating peers, lack of marital attachment, job instability, and not deciding to "go straight". Anyway, the reason the desistance theory is more powerful than the social bond theory is because choosing to end relationships with or associate differently with law-violating peers is more effective at

detering people from committing crimes than emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms. After all, as the old saying goes, “we are the average of the five people we spend the most time with”; so, if we stop spending time with law-violating people and instead associate with law-abiding people, we will become less inclined to commit crimes because we will experience less peer pressure, influence, and exposure leading us towards crime. In contrast, as mentioned before, emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms are no guarantee that one will steer clear of crime. There are, after all, countless religious clergy, college-educated professionals, celebrities, and politicians that commit crimes. A few examples include Tim Allen, Mike Tyson, Bill Cosby, and Ray Nagin. And so, in that way, the desistance theory is more compelling than the social bond theory because the factors that lead to desistance are more effective in deterring individuals from committing crimes than emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms.

Thus, the social bond theory is the least compelling of the three control theories because emotional attachment to others, conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and conventional norms are insufficient in deterring individuals from committing crimes. Crime affects all of us regardless of whether or not we are direct victims. Crime can lead to public safety concerns, economic troubles, adverse physical and mental health effects, and worsened social functioning, among other things. Because crime can cause such a disruption in our communities, we must determine how to deter individuals from engaging in criminal acts. The containment, social bond, and desistance theories are among the most well-known and widely accepted theories that provide explanations for what deters individuals from committing

crimes. We must continue to analyze and evaluate these theories in order to implement them into our communities, to prevent an uprise in crime from disrupting our community. Fortunately, the study of criminology is becoming widespread around the globe. As the world obtains a better grasp upon criminology, expectantly global crime will diminish, leaving a better future for our descendants.

References

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