COERCION, SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND CRIME: AN EMERGING THEORETICAL CONSENSUS*

MARK COLVIN
George Mason University

FRANCIS T. CULLEN
University of Cincinnati

THOMAS VANDER VEN
Ohio University

Two themes, coercion and social support, have emerged over the past two decades in criminology that can be used to build a new integrated theory of crime. The authors provide a review of recent theoretical developments in criminology to demonstrate that two interconnected themes provide the basis for a new consensus in theory and crime policy. With some important exceptions, coercion causes crime and social support prevents crime. The authors develop a theory of differential social support and coercion that integrates concepts from a broad range of criminological theories. Implications of this integrated theory for public policy are explored.

Across a wide variety of theories, two general themes are emerging: (1) Coercion causes crime and (2) social support prevents crime. Although these statements are generally true, we develop some important caveats in the discussion that highlight the nuances in the interplay between social support and coercion. These themes are interconnected and provide the basis for developing an integrated theory in criminology that can form a new theoretical and public policy consensus about crime.

We develop the central thesis of this article through the following stages. First, we examine the theme of coercion as a cause of crime as it has emerged in the criminological literature over the past two decades (Agnew, 1992; Athens, 1994; Colvin, 2000; Colvin and Pauly, 1983; Hagan and McCarthy, 1997; Patterson, 1982; Regoli and Hewitt, 1994; Tittle, 1995). Coercion can be defined as a force that compels or intimidates an individual to act because of the fear or anxiety it creates (Colvin, 2000; Etzioni, 1970). This force can emerge from impersonal sources, such as economic compulsion or state power, or from interpersonal sources in

* Thanks to Hal Pepinsky and to the anonymous reviewers from *Criminology* for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

which an individual coerces another for purposes of compliance. Coercion can also involve the actual or threatened removal of social supports (Colvin, 2000). The theme of coercion is rooted in the strain theory tradition of criminology (Agnew, 1985; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Merton, 1938).

Second, we explore the emerging theme that social support prevents crime (Cullen, 1994). Social support is defined as the delivery (or perceived delivery) of assistance from communities, social networks, and confiding partners in meeting the instrumental and expressive needs of individuals (Cullen, 1994; Lin, 1986). As with coercion, social supports can occur at both the micro level and macro level of society. The theme of social support has for some time informed research in physical and mental health (Cohen and Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988; Lin et al., 1986; Thoits, 1995; Vaux, 1988) and is connected to recent developments in social capital theory (Coleman, 1990; Hagan, 1994; Hagan and McCarthy, 1997; Sullivan, 1989; Wright et al., 1995). Third, we articulate a differential social support and coercion theory of crime that ties these emerging themes in criminology together in a new integrated theory. Finally, we briefly explicate the policy implications of this new theory.

COERCION

The theme that coercive forces and relations are causes of crime has been a feature of several criminological theories. In this section, we provide an overview of the emergence of this concept.

Patterson (1982, 1990, 1995) describes aversive family interchanges and coercive disciplining patterns as prime sources of juvenile delinquency. He argues that inconsistent but frequent punitive forms of discipline create a coercive pattern that is reflected in all family interactions. Coercive interchanges include physical attacks, which are often the outcome of escalating nonphysical coercive interchanges that include negative commands, critical remarks, teasing, humiliation, whining, yelling, and threats. Through these aversive family interchanges, coercion becomes a primary learned response to adverse situations that arise in both family and nonfamily settings (Snyder and Patterson, 1987). Children from these coercive family backgrounds are more likely to become "early starters" in delinquency (Patterson, 1995; Simons et al., 1994), who later emerge as "life-course-persistent" offenders (Moffitt, 1997). Indeed, research suggests that physically abusive and erratic disciplining of children and adolescents (including corporal punishment that falls short of abuse) is related to subsequent delinquency and crime (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; McCord, 1991; Smith and Thornberry, 1995; Straus, 1994; Straus et al., 1991; Widom, 1989). A child's coercive behavior (learned initially in coercive family interactions) is brought into other social settings and is

likely to produce a coercive response from others in these nonfamily environments.

The connection between coercion in one setting and coercion in another setting is a key feature of Colvin and Pauly's (1983) integrated structural-Marxist theory. A central idea in this theory is that coercive controls (in various settings) produce an alienated bond between the controller and the one who is being controlled. This weak, alienated social bond is reproduced as children move from a coercive family setting to school and peer relations in which their behaviors elicit coercive responses from others. Following Kohn's (1977) research, Colvin and Pauly argue that the coercive family discipline that initially produces a child's alienated bond is related to the parents' involvement in coercive relations at their workplaces, which reinforce weak, alienated social bonds in the parents. The idea that weak social bonds produce delinquency derives from social control theory (Hirschi, 1969). Colvin and Pauly theorize that weak social bonds have their origins in coercive relations of control. This insight is an extension of Etzioni's (1970) compliance theory, in which coercive control produces an alienated involvement (or alienated social bond) on the part of subordinates in control relations. Other types of control produce stronger social bonds: Normative controls produce strong, morally based bonds; remunerative controls produce intermediately intense bonds based on calculations of self-interest.[1] In Colvin and Pauly's theory, coercive control is most conducive to the production of serious, persistent delinquency because it produces a weak, alienated social bond that is reproduced across social settings as the individual interacts with others in coercive interchanges.

Agnew's (1985, 1992) general strain theory is also connected to the theme of coercion. Agnew's reconceptualized strain theory highlights extreme negative stimuli as primary sources of strain. This reconceptualization moves strain theory's emphasis away from the presumed means-ends disjuncture that produces frustration (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955; Merton, 1938). More important sources of strain, Agnew argues, are negative stimuli that produce anger. Agnew's (1985:154–155) descriptions of negative stimuli involve several instances that can be characterized as coercive: adolescents being "placed in aversive situations from

1. Randall Collins (1992:63–72) discusses similar categories of power, force, money, and solidarity, which correspond, respectively, to Etzioni's coercive, remunerative, and normative types of power. Collins highlights some of the paradoxes involved in the exercise of power. In particular, Collins argues that coercive force can cause low productivity, weak initiative, and anger, which may undercut compliance. Collins's discussion reflects Sykes's (1958) classic discussion of the "defects of total power" and Colvin's (1992) discussion of the "contradictions of control"; both Sykes and Colvin focus on the use of power in prisons.

which they cannot legally escape" and "parental rejection, unfair or inconsistent discipline, parental conflict, adverse or negative school experiences, and unsatisfactory relations with peers." Coercive interpersonal relations constitute the most aversive and negative forces individuals encounter. These are most likely to produce a strong sense of anger. The anger is only intensified if the individual perceives the coercive treatment as unjust or arbitrary. Instead of producing conformity, such coercive treatment creates greater defiance of authority (Sherman, 1993).

Impersonal coercive forces, such as economic pressures, can also produce strain in which the person feels pushed by negative stimuli that produce a sense of desperation and anger (Agnew et al., 1996; Hagan and McCarthy, 1997; Menard, 1995). These impersonal coercive sources of strain point to the macrolevel forces first highlighted in Merton's (1938) classic strain theory (Cullen and Wright, 1997; Messner and Rosenfeld, 1994).

Other recent criminological theories also highlight the theme of coercion. Athens (1994) describes coercive interpersonal relations as primary forces in the creation of dangerous violent criminals. Regoli and Hewitt (1994) argue that coercive acts by adults in their quest for order play a major role in creating an oppressive environment for juveniles that produces delinquency. Tittle (1995) argues that repression (a concept similar to coercion) creates "control deficits" that depending on the strength and consistency of the repression, produce predatory, defiant, or submissive forms of deviance. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) focus on coercive forces in both the background and foreground in their explanation of delinquency among homeless street youth, and most recently, Colvin (2000) emphasizes this theme in his differential coercion theory.

Colvin (2000) posits two dimensions of coercion: the strength of the coercive force (from no coercion to very strong coercion) and the consistency with which it is applied or experienced. Coercion can thus be experienced on a more or less consistent or erratic basis. An erratic experience of coercion has different social-psychological effects than does a consistent experience of coercion, most notably, on the direction of anger produced and on the degree of self-control induced. Erratic coercion produces an extreme other-directed anger because, following Agnew's (1992) insight, the perception of unjust and arbitrary treatment is heightened in an erratic schedule of coercion. Erratic coercion also induces low self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990); an erratic schedule of coercion teaches individuals that they cannot control consequences because negative stimuli appear to occur randomly, not as predictable outcomes of behavior. Thus, there is no pattern or incentive to learn self-control. Consistent coercion produces self-directed anger and a rigid type of self-control based on constant fear of certain reprisal from an external source. Colvin (2000) argues

that erratic coercion is most conducive to chronic predatory criminal behavior.[2]

An important caveat to the general statement that coercion causes crime is that consistent coercion produces low levels of criminal behavior; but it also produces low levels of prosocial behavior and a propensity for mental health problems, such as chronic depression (Colvin, 2000). Although in theory consistent coercion can prevent crime, it is highly difficult to maintain consistent coercion in interpersonal relations, which requires nearly constant monitoring to detect noncompliance. Except for extreme situations of monitoring (such as that exercised over females in highly repressive, patriarchal households or over prisoners in "supermax" prisons), consistent coercion is often rendered erratic by the difficulty for controllers to maintain close surveillance. Thus, the crime-controlling effect of consistent coercion is ephemeral. In this regard, coercion may have its best crime-controlling effect in concert with an array of social supports in which coercion remains subtle and in the background and used only as a last resort when social supports fail to create compliance (Braithwaite, 1989, 1999). We will return to this point later during our discussion of policy implications.

Colvin (2000) differentiates interpersonal from impersonal forms of coercion. The first occurs within direct interpersonal relations of control. The second (which draws on Merton's [1938] classic strain theory) is connected to pressures from larger structural arrangements that create an indirect experience of coercion. Interpersonal coercion involves the use or threat of force and intimidation aimed at creating compliance in an interpersonal relation. These microlevel coercive processes of control can involve the actual or threatened use of physical force or the actual or threatened removal of social supports. Impersonal coercion is experienced as pressure arising from structural arrangements and circumstances beyond individual control that creates anxiety, desperation, and anger. These macrolevel sources of coercion can include economic and social pressures created by structural unemployment, poverty, or competition among groups. As these definitions suggest, the experience of coercion can involve the removal of social supports at both the microlevel of interpersonal relations and the macrolevel of social and governmental structures. These definitions create a link between the theme of coercion and the other important theme emerging in recent criminological theories: social support.

2. Tittle (1995:189) similarly argues that moderate repression (which Colvin [2000] equates to erratic coercion) produces acts of direct predation, whereas extreme repression (which Colvin equates to consistent coercion) produces submission. (See Note 4 for more on Tittle's concepts.)

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Cullen (1994) demonstrates that social support is an often-neglected theme that has nonetheless implicitly informed criminological studies since the early twentieth century. Although the concept of coercion has its roots in strain theory, social support is rooted in the idea, first promoted by the Chicago School, that organized networks of human relations can assist people in meeting both expressive and instrumental needs, which prevents crime. The concept of social support has been a major influence on research into the psychosocial origins of physical and mental health (Cohen and Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988; Lin et al., 1986; Thoits, 1995; Vaux, 1988). Only recently has this concept been explicitly applied to understanding crime and deviance (Cullen, 1994; Cullen and Wright, 1997; Currie, 1985; Drennon-Gala, 1995; Wright, 1996; Wright et al., 1995).

Social support can be expressive or instrumental. Expressive social supports include the sharing and ventilation of emotions and the affirmation of one's and others' self-worth and dignity. Instrumental social supports include material and financial assistance and the giving of advice, guidance, and connections for positive social advancement in legitimate society. Social supports exist at several levels of society, in the immediate interactions within families and among friends and within larger social networks of neighborhoods, communities, and nations. Expressive and instrumental social supports are potentially provided during informal social relations among families and friends and through formal networks in schools, workplaces, and governmental agencies involved in welfare and criminal justice. The extent to which social supports are provided varies across families, neighborhoods, communities, and nations. Social supports reduce the impact of strain by providing resources that allow individuals to cope with adversity through noncriminal means (Cullen and Wright, 1997). Social supports also create the context in which strong social bonds can emerge, because enduring relations of mutual trust are forged through the giving of assistance (Cullen, 1994). Thus, social support prevents crime.

A dimension of social support that Cullen (1994:531) briefly notes is the consistency with which it is delivered. This is a point we expand on here. As in Colvin's (2000) discussion of coercion, social supports can be delivered on a more or less consistent or erratic schedule with differential social-psychological effects. The consistent provision of social support creates a stronger sense of trust between the recipient and the giver of social support. (The giver may be a confiding individual or a larger social institution.) This sense of trust forms the basis for a strong social bond that becomes generalized into a strong moral commitment to others and to legitimate social institutions. Altruism, rather than individual self-interest,

emerges as a primary motive for personal behavior, which prevents crime (Chamlin and Cochran, 1997). Experiencing a dependable delivery of social support from others prevents strain and anger from arising and induces strong, internalized self-control (Cullen et al., 1999:193) as people learn that their behaviors can predictably lead to positive outcomes and more social support.

Erratic delivery of social support means that an individual cannot depend on receiving assistance from others or from social institutions. This does not mean that individuals in these erratic situations of social support are necessarily feeling coerced (or under strain), but they are more or less being set adrift to fend for themselves as best they can. Such situations of unpredictable social support produce a moderate level of anger and induce low self-control because the provision of social support does not seem to be consistently elicited by one's behavior. At best, the individual can receive assistance by manipulating potential sources of social support, which creates an intermediately intense social bond based not on trust or a moral commitment to others but on a calculation of selfish interest. Such erratic provision of social support allows the person to drift toward deviant explorations, often as part of a search for alternative sources of social support.

Another dimension of social support highlighted by Cullen (1994:544) is the differential sources of social support. Social support may come from law-abiding sources whose assistance promotes conformity, or it may come from illegitimate sources that promote criminal behavior. These insights derive from differential association theory (Sutherland et al., 1992) and social learning theory (Akers, 1985). Adapting Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) insight about differential opportunity structures, if individuals are denied access to social support from legitimate sources, they may seek access to social support from illegitimate sources. This is an important caveat to the general statement that social support prevents crime. If allowed access to these illegitimate support networks, individuals may be assisted toward gaining knowledge, skills, connections, role models, a sense of belonging, and social status that promote success in various criminal activities. Illegitimate social support thus allows individuals to accumulate "criminal capital," which is the information, technical skills, social networks, and resources necessary for success in criminal endeavors (Hagan and McCarthy, 1997). Social support from these criminal networks encourages chronic involvement in more skilled and organized criminal activities. Without access to illegitimate sources of social support, such criminal capital cannot be accumulated and individuals may drift in a pattern of exploratory deviance, engaging in moderate levels of disorganized, unskilled criminal activities.

Although social support and coercion are linked through an inverse

relationship, this does not mean that the concepts are polar opposites. They point to qualitatively different, although related, phenomena. As Cullen (1994) argues, control relations are not synonymous with social support. Control relations can involve social support; for instance (following Etzioni [1970]), normative control can involve the delivery of expressive social support and remunerative control can involve the delivery of instrumental social support. Social support also becomes an effective method for control when the person being controlled understands that coercion lies in the background as a last resort if social support fails to create compliance (Braithwaite, 1989, 1999), but social support activities can occur independently of any relationship of control. Therefore, relations involving social support should not be reduced to simple relations of control.

Some commentators depict the humanitarian ideologies and efforts of reformers in assisting the poor, the insane, and the criminal as devices that merely enhance coercive control (Foucault, 1977; Platt, 1969). There is much truth in this critique of benevolent reform; clearly, the history of many reform efforts has involved a deterioration of good intentions into dreadful coercive outcomes (Colvin, 1997; Margolin, 1997; Rothman, 1980). Reformers' policies were often misguided, naïve, and shaped by class interests, but to dismiss all of these reformers as mere agents of control is to miss the humanity, decency, and caring that informed many of their reform efforts (Garland, 1990). In addition, the struggle for enhanced social supports (by workers' unions and their progressive allies in government, for instance) has brought enormous benefits to many ordinary people by reducing their experiences of coercion.

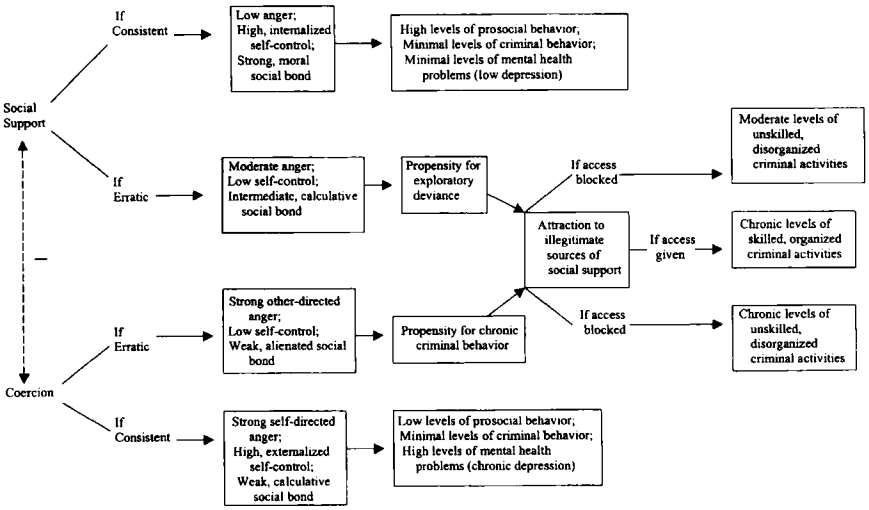
In any event, the key point here is that coercion and social support are distinct variables. They tend, however, to be inversely related. Receipt of social supports can reduce a person's experience of coercion, and coercion can undermine social supports. In general, social support from legitimate sources tends to have an opposite effect on crime (prevents it) from that of coercion (promotes it).

A DIFFERENTIAL SOCIAL SUPPORT AND COERCION THEORY OF CRIME

Our discussion of the concepts of coercion and social support above builds toward a new integrated theory of crime, which is the focus of this section. Figure 1 presents the basic model of the differential social support and coercion theory. Many of the insights contained in this model have already been presented in the previous sections, where we discuss the emerging concepts of coercion and social support.

First, as already mentioned, social support and coercion tend to be

Figure 1 Model of Differential Social Support and Coercion



inversely related. At the macro level, nations and communities that provide greater social support tend to be less coercive, and vice versa (Cullen, 1994; Currie, 1998; Messner and Rosenfeld, 1994). Societies that provide greater social support create the context in which social support is more likely to be delivered at the micro level in interpersonal relationships. At the micro level, social support softens or prevents the experience of coercion, whereas coercion undermines (and threatens to remove) social support.

Second, social support and coercion can be delivered on either a consistent or erratic basis. Consistent social support greatly lessens the overt use of coercion, although coercion may be an implied response of last resort under conditions of consistent social support. Consistent coercion greatly lessens social support because it involves constant threats and the actual removal of expressive and instrumental social supports along with overt physical punishments. Erratic social support and erratic coercion may exist side by side, as the individual bounces between the two, or they may occur simultaneously. Whether social support and coercion are consistent or erratic is an indeterminate process, represented by the "If Erratic" and "If Consistent" points in the model. These "if" statements represent "structuring variables" (Cullen, 1983), which channel individuals toward specific outcomes. In this case, the immediate effect of erratic and consistent social support or coercion is a differential set of social-psychological outcomes.

Social support, if delivered consistently, produces low anger, a high,

internalized sense of self-control, and a strong social bond based on a moral commitment to others (Cullen, 1994; Cullen et al., 1999). This set of social-psychological characteristics produces high levels of prosocial behavior and minimal levels of criminal behavior. Consistent social support is also conducive to low levels of mental health problems, such as depression (Lin et al., 1986). Consistent social support creates compliance because it meets individuals' expressive and instrumental needs.

Social support that is delivered on an erratic basis produces a moderate level of anger, low self-control, and a social bond that is intermediately intense, based on a calculation of self-interest. These social-psychological characteristics make a person more prone to explore deviant pleasures, manipulate authority in attempts to gain assistance, and search for alternative sources of social support.

Coercion that is delivered or experienced on a consistent basis produces a strong sense of anger that is directed toward the self (because outward expressions of anger are likely to be met with immediate, painful reprisals). In order to avoid painful consequences, which are predictable results of noncompliance, the individual rigidly exercises self-control. This self-control, based on fear of pain from an external source, is related to a weak social bond that is based on a calculation of fear and pain avoidance. Consistent coercion, which requires close monitoring of behavior, produces minimal levels of criminal behavior but also produces very low levels of prosocial behavior (such as successful pursuit of an education). It also produces a strong propensity for mental health problems, such as chronic depression, which is also related to the relative absence of social supports (Lin et al., 1986).

Erratic coercion produces strong other-directed anger, low self-control, and weak, alienated social bonds (Colvin, 2000). The erratic nature of the coercion heightens the sense of injustice created by arbitrary treatment, which increases the level of anger directed at others. This erratic coercion also places painful, negative consequences on a near-random schedule that induces low self-control in an individual who sees no connections between behavior and painful outcomes. This low self-control means that few brakes are placed on the expression of anger, which is directed toward others. These coercive experiences alienate the individual from others and from legitimate social institutions, which are seen as coercive and arbitrary. Thus, the weakest level of social bonding arises from a pattern of erratic coercion. These social-psychological characteristics create a propensity for chronic involvement in criminal behavior. Because this path creates the highest level of other-directed anger, it is likely that predatory crime (especially those that are more anger-driven) will be most pronounced for those emerging from this path.

Both erratic social support and erratic coercion create individuals who

are attracted to and seek out illegitimate sources of social support. Individuals emerging from a pattern of erratic social support are attracted to these illegitimate sources because they see these as the only potential sources of dependable assistance in meeting instrumental and expressive needs. Individuals emerging from a pattern of erratic coercion are attracted to these illegitimate sources primarily because they appear to be the only potential escape from coercive forces. (An individual caught up in a consistent pattern of coercion has a difficult time envisioning an escape from coercive forces.)

Here we encounter another set of structuring variables (Cullen, 1983) in the form of "if" statements. If access to these illegitimate sources of social support is given, then the individual is allowed to enter a social network in which social support (through tutelage and other processes through which criminal capital is gained) transforms deviant and criminal propensities into various skilled and organized criminal activities. The nature of the criminal activity will depend in part on the content of the learning created by a specific criminal network, which may or may not lead to specialization because a specific network may involve connections to a variety of criminal activities.[3] The categorization into skilled, organized and unskilled, disorganized captures an important distinction in types of crime, but not necessarily in types of criminals; individuals, depending on their access to illegitimate social support at any given time, may be involved in both unskilled, disorganized or skilled, organized crime. Skilled, organized criminal activities can include any number of street crimes, such as drug-selling operations, burglary rings, and professional auto theft rings. These organized and skilled activities can also include many forms of white-collar crime connected to workplaces or occupations in which individuals learn illicit skills and gain connections for illegal gain or are coerced by corporate culture and the forces of competition to engage in white-collar criminal activities (Braithwaite, 1995; Colvin, 2000; Sutherland, 1949).

Obviously, only some individuals will be allowed access to these alternative networks of social support. If the social support in these illegitimate activities remains consistent, then the individual will be able to pursue in a persistent fashion these avenues to criminal success. If the illegitimate social support is erratic, then the person may bounce between skilled, organized criminal activities and unskilled, disorganized criminal activities, depending on the level of illegitimate social support available at any given time.

3. Research on criminal specialization tends to show that chronic street criminals generally engage in a wide variety of criminal activities, which may become somewhat more specialized as they age (Piquero et al., 1999).

This latter point is similar to Tittle's (1995:242–244) argument that "control ratios" can change abruptly for an individual, which causes sudden shifts in the types of deviance an individual engages in.[4] The differential levels of social support and coercion affect control ratios at any particular point in time. Social support (whether from a legitimate or illegitimate source) assists individuals in controlling their social environments, which gives them some degree of control balance or even control surplus. We argue that whether a control surplus promotes criminal or prosocial behavior depends, respectively, on the illegal or legal nature of the source of social support that assists individuals in controlling their environments.[5] Coercion involves being controlled by others or by impersonal forces and thus involves a control deficit, the degree of which depends on the erratic or consistent nature of the coercion applied or experienced. In short, we argue that control ratios can shift with changes in the relative level of illegitimate social support and coercion, thus altering at any point in time the level and general type of deviance (which we categorize as skilled, organized or as unskilled, disorganized).

If access to illegitimate sources of social support is blocked, then gaining the criminal capital necessary to engage in skilled, organized criminal

4. Tittle (1995) argues that deviance is related to the ratio of control a person exercises to that which is exercised over the person. This ratio may be balanced (or equal to 1), in surplus (greater than 1), or in deficit (less than 1). A balanced ratio of control is most conducive to conformity. A control surplus (involving varying degrees of autonomy and greater control over others and the social and physical environment) creates a general predisposition for deviance involving exploitation, plunder, or decadence. A control deficit (involving varying degrees of repression and control by others or impersonal forces) creates a general predisposition for deviance involving direct predation, defiance, or submission.

5. This is a major departure from Tittle's thesis. In his theory, a control surplus is conducive to certain forms of deviance involving exploitation, plunder, or decadence. On this point, his theory derives directly from control theory, which argues that too few constraints on individuals produce crime. Tittle assumes an underlying drive for autonomy, which is allowed to emerge in a control surplus when restraints on basic drives are lifted. As we see it, underlying drives like autonomy (or the "id," the "will to power," or a "natural inclination to be deviant") play no role in this process. Control surpluses, in which individuals have greater control over their social and physical environment than these forces have over them, are not in and of themselves criminogenic. Social supports assist individuals in mastering their environments (gaining control over them and enjoying a sense of autonomy and freedom). Gaining a control surplus or a control balance is greatly dependent on social supports from others and from social institutions. This freedom from restraint is not (as control theorists would have it) a prelude for deviant impulses to bubble to the surface. Our major point here is this: Whether a control surplus is criminogenic or becomes a chance for altruistic behavior (in which someone with power helps others rather than exploits them) is dependent on the source of social support, whether it is from a legitimate source that promotes altruism or from an illegitimate source that promotes a selfish pursuit of pleasure.

activities cannot occur. The individual will be left to pursue unskilled, disorganized criminal activities, which involve less potential for remuneration and much greater risk of legal sanctions and retaliation from competing criminals.

We postulate that whether these unskilled, disorganized criminal activities are committed at a moderate or chronic level depends on the path that formed the individual's background in relation to social support and coercion. Those emerging from erratic social supports that formed a propensity for exploratory deviance will pursue these activities at a lower, more moderate rate than will those who emerge from an erratic coercive background, which formed a propensity for chronic criminal involvement. Obviously, an individual can emerge from a background that included the erratic experience of both social support and coercion, which creates a mixture of the pure types represented in the path model. Such a mixture would be related to a more pronounced involvement in unskilled, disorganized criminal activities than that emerging from an experience that involved only erratic social support with no erratic coercion. It is the erratic coercive element that is more likely to drive chronic involvement in unskilled, disorganized crime.

Part of the explanation for this differential involvement in these unskilled, disorganized crimes is the degree to which each background experience induces a calculating mentality in which costs and benefits of crime are weighed. Someone from a background of erratic social support, who learns to manipulate others in efforts to gain social support and in the process develops an intermediately intense, calculative social bond, will be more likely to approach a criminal opportunity with a calculating spirit. The relatively low yield and high risk involved in unskilled, disorganized crime will more often than not be calculated as not worth the risk, thus leading to lower rates of criminal involvement. This calculation of risk will be altered if the individual is allowed access to illegitimate sources of social support because connections and skills reduce risks and raise the rewards of crime, thus propelling more chronic involvement in these more organized and skilled criminal activities.

Someone from a background of erratic coercion will generally not be deterred by rational considerations; instead, this individual will seize a criminal opportunity with little thought of consequences beyond the immediate gratification it brings. A calculating spirit may emerge if this individual is given access to illegitimate sources of social support, which changes the individual's experience in relation to social support and coercion and alters the general type of criminal activity the individual engages in. Without such access, this individual is more likely to chronically engage in impulsive and anger-driven acts of unskilled, disorganized crime. Such activities often elicit and reproduce both interpersonal and

impersonal coercive forces, which drive the individual deeper into criminal involvement (Colvin, 2000; Hagan and McCarthy, 1997; Katz, 1988; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997).

Athens (1994:15) argues, "a social experience emerges from the special interaction that takes place between a human organism and his social environment during the process of living. This interaction takes the form of human beings acting toward one another. What makes it special is that it generates both thoughts and emotions." Actions by human beings toward other human beings can be coercive or supportive, and these actions can occur on a more or less consistent or erratic basis. The differential delivery of social support and coercion generates specific sets of social-psychological responses that are differentially related to criminal and noncriminal outcomes. Individuals can become "embedded" (Hagan and McCarthy, 1997) in socially supportive relations or in coercive relations at various points in the life course.

To the extent that individuals are embedded in legitimate relations of social support, they are caught up in a virtuous cycle. As they receive social support from others, they learn to give social support to others (Cullen, 1994). This giving of social support to others elicits further social support in return in a process that builds on and further expands the individuals' "social capital" (Hagan and McCarthy, 1997) and sense of altruism (Chamlin and Cochran, 1997). Thus, the individuals are less likely to engage in crime. If a society creates multiple networks that consistently deliver this type of social support, then an entire society can enjoy a virtuous cycle that creates minimal levels of crime.

Conversely, an individual can be embedded in coercive relations, which creates a vicious cycle. The coercion and lack of social support that a person encounters in these relationships create unresponsiveness to the needs, desires, and dignity of others (which Pepinsky [1988] argues is at the very root of criminal behavior) and promote the use of coercion when interacting with others. Such coercive behavior elicits further coercion in response and reduces social support even more. Individuals caught up in this vicious cycle are likely to be the most criminally involved, especially in predatory crimes. Whether these predatory crimes are unskilled and disorganized or skilled and organized depends on connections to illegitimate sources of social support. Societies that allow high levels of structural unemployment and promote an ethic of "dog-eat-dog" competitive individualism (Messner and Rosenfeld, 1994) create the basis for multiplying the coercive networks that spin more and more individuals into the vicious cycles that create high rates of crime. This vicious cycle of coercion involves processes of "disintegrative shaming" that stigmatize individuals and push them away from the law-abiding community (Braithwaite, 1989).

In contrast, social support promotes a process of (and in fact is the essential basis for) "reintegrative shaming" that is characteristic of societies with low crime (Braithwaite, 1989; Cullen, 1994).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The clear implication of the theory presented in this article is that to reduce crime, societies must enhance the legitimate sources of social support and reduce the forces of coercion. These efforts must occur at several levels of society and as part of crime prevention programs and programs aimed at offender rehabilitation. (See Currie [1998]; Cullen et al. [1999]; and Colvin [2000] for details of public policies and programs outlined in this section.)

Social support and coercion occur at both the micro level of interpersonal relations and at the macro level of larger societal structures. The degree to which an individual's interpersonal experiences are socially supportive or coercive is influenced by larger economic and cultural contexts that frame these experiences. These macrolevel influences can accelerate or retard the creation at interpersonal levels of coercive vicious cycles or socially supportive virtuous cycles.

Public policies must aim toward providing a consistent level of social support to individuals throughout the life course. Social support to families is a key element in reducing coercive family processes. Such assistance as parent-effectiveness training, paid family leave, health care insurance, nutrition programs, and visiting nurse programs help to create supportive family environments that are less coercive (Bank et al., 1991; Currie, 1998; Patterson, 1982). Families that provide greater social support produce children with less psychological distress and behavior problems (Barrera and Li, 1996). Preschool "head start" programs assist children in meeting the challenges of education and create the types of psychological and behavioral outcomes that elicit for these children continued social support as they pursue their education. Schools must create environments in which consistent social support is provided to all students, which means that education and teacher training needs to be given the highest priority in government spending. Coercive practices and competitive relations in school need to be replaced with participatory democratic procedures and cooperative learning environments in order to reduce student alienation. Youth, especially during the ages when they are most likely to be involved in crime, need to be provided with consistent social support that guides them toward legitimate, productive social roles. Mentoring programs such as the Big Brother/Big Sister programs and boys and girls clubs that involve positive role models giving direct social support to youth are important examples. Social support for young people can be provided

through enhanced national service programs that lead to government funding for higher education or training in skilled occupations. Workplace environments can be made less coercive and more socially supportive through democratic practices, expanded collective bargaining, and worker participation in ownership and control of industries. Workplaces that provide social support to employees and their families and continuing training and education create more productive and self-directed workers who make industries more competitive in the global economy (Colvin, 2000; Reich, 1991). All of these measures create a system in which individuals throughout the life course become embedded in socially supportive relations. These measures create the basis for a society to enjoy a virtuous cycle of social support that leads to lower rates of crime (and, as our theory suggests, to higher rates of prosocial activities and better mental health). The public supports many of the early intervention programs that are part of a broader policy of enhancing social supports to prevent crime (Cullen et al., 1998). With an organized system of social support that is geographically and socially distributed so that equal access to assistance from legitimate sources is enhanced, crime can be prevented to a much greater extent than it is today.

The theory also implies radical change in the way our criminal justice system operates. Our reactions to crime are based largely on coercion. Disintegrative shaming pervades our current coercive criminal justice operations (Braithwaite, 1989), in which overt coercion often becomes a first resort, knee-jerk reaction to crime. Often, especially in the United States, these coercive responses are delivered erratically, which creates arbitrary outcomes that only enhance the anger and sense of injustice that drives criminal behavior. As Sherman (1993) argues, these coercive practices produce defiance to authority, which creates more crime. Our coercive efforts to "get tough" on crime do not work and are often counterproductive (Andrews and Bonta, 1998; Cullen et al., 1999; Gendreau et al., 2000; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998).

A less coercive approach to crime control and criminal rehabilitation is clearly implied by the theory presented in this article. Of course, we could attempt to tighten criminal justice controls to deliver an overt coercive response to crime on a more consistent basis, but as our theory implies (and as Collins [1992:66] argues), coercion delivered on such a highly consistent schedule would produce demoralized, depressed individuals who become a different type of burden on society. It is not at all clear that this consistent, coercive regime of control could be sustained unless we embark on building an apparatus of surveillance that is so intrusive that it becomes a greater crime against humanity than are the crimes it is presumably preventing. (It is also not clear that a society could endure economically or culturally with a generally dispirited people who lose initiative and

creativity and become less productive under such a repressive regime of control [Collins 1992:69; Colvin 2000:174]). Thus, criminal justice policies that are consistent with (and are an essential element of) a noncoercive, socially supportive society are needed.

Criminal justice and corrections policies should be aimed at reducing coercion while enhancing social supports (Colvin, 2000; Cullen et al., 1999; Gendreau et al., 1998). These policies must set a clear and consistent regimen that is fair but firm; gives a strong, consistent message of disapproval for criminal behavior; consistently rewards prosocial behavior; and disrupts contacts with any criminal networks by providing access to legitimate networks of social support. Social support is the key ingredient in the process of successful "reintegrative shaming" (Braithwaite, 1989). Coercion then becomes a response of last resort, after consistent efforts at social support have failed to create compliance. This strategy of crime control can work for both street crime and white-collar crime (Braithwaite, 1995, 1999). The individual during this rehabilitative process begins to understand, with the help of cognitive and behavioral therapies (Andrews and Bonta, 1998), that positive or negative outcomes are predicated on individuals' behaviors, which they can control to produce positive outcomes. As this cognitive perception is reinforced through the actual experience of receiving social support for positive behavior (with the understanding that coercion lies in the background as a last resort for negative behavior), self-control is induced. As both expressive and instrumental social supports are enhanced, individuals move away from coercive forces that affected their lives. The experience created by this process creates lessons in noncoercion and mutual social support, in which compassion and caring (as opposed to vindictiveness) are emphasized. This process is central to Pepinsky's (1991) "peacemaking criminology." The process attempts to move individuals from a vicious coercive cycle that creates stigmatization, more crime, and more coercion to a virtuous cycle in which individuals learn to elicit social support from others by giving social support to others. In the process, the greatest victim of crime, general trust within the community, is restored (Braithwaite, 1999; Lerman, 1999).

A process that seeks to undo the coercive, vicious cycle that leads to crime requires an economy and a culture that is based in social support and noncoercion. Efforts at crime control must therefore be broad-based, not narrowly focused on after-the-fact reactions to crime that do nothing to alter the underlying processes that produce crime. In fact, to the extent that these reactions involve erratic coercion, they merely reproduce the causes of crime and become detrimental to the cause of crime reduction, so drastic changes are needed to move us away from the vicious cycle of coercion.

Getting from where we are now to a noncoercive, socially supportive

society will require cultural and political changes in nations like the United States. The task of creating these changes is clearly no small order. The pervasive competitive individualism contained in the culture of the United States fosters a mean-spirited, "dog-eat-dog" mentality that promotes coercive institutional responses that are contrary to policies of social support, which are based in sentiments of compassion and altruism. These coercive responses are also given support by a "masculine" bias in our culture that equates coercion and "toughness" with "manliness" and compassion, nurturing, and support with the (supposedly "feminine") traits of "weakness" and "softness." Ironically, this same masculine bias also gives rise to various forms of crime (Messerschmidt, 1993). Since the 1960s, politics in the United States has been shaped by these "get tough" attitudes that have created more coercive welfare and criminal justice policies (Beckett, 1997; Gans, 1996), but historically, the United States also has shown signs of being benevolent, forgiving, and, on certain issues, tolerant (Wolfe, 1998). Religion has historically been, and remains, a powerful influence in American culture. Contrary to what many people think, religiosity can foster feelings of forgiveness toward criminals along with more punitive reactions (Applegate et al., 2000), and surveys have shown that the public gives stronger support to rehabilitation and early intervention as approaches to crime reduction than they do to expansion of prisons (Cullen et al., 1998; Currie, 1998). So there are within American culture strands of compassion that can be built on to promote policies and activities that expand social support. In fact, there have been recent signs of a possible change away from the "get tough" rhetoric that has guided political discourse in recent decades: the conservative Republican candidate for president in the year 2000 felt compelled for political reasons to modify his conservatism with the adjective "compassionate." Although only a symbolic gesture with the promise of few substantive programmatic changes, such symbols have important cultural impact (Garland, 1990). Thus, the cultural and political openings for promotion of expanded social support exist. If research can also show (as it is beginning to do) that these activities can work to reduce crime better than do coercive responses (Cullen et al., 1999; Currie, 1998), then it is also possible to promote social support policies by playing on another important strand of American culture: pragmatism.

It is ironic that a nation like the United States strongly promotes the value of freedom while it incarcerates a greater proportion of its population than does any other nation in the world (with the possible exception of Russia) (Currie, 1998). In this context of "freedom," a significant proportion of juveniles and adults have a generalized experience of coercion in families, schools, and workplaces and the bureaucracies of welfare and criminal justice. The contrast between the rhetoric of freedom and the

reality of coercion is stark for many people. For many of those caught up in these coercive relations, crime seems to offer them a way of "being free" when other avenues for autonomy seem to be closed (Shover, 1996). Thus, the contradiction between the value of freedom and the reality for many of coercion fosters crime. To live up to our value of freedom while reducing crime, it is imperative that we offer social support to individuals and families that free them from coercive forces. Social support offers an avenue to freedom that fosters responsibility, mutual help, and trust. It is in this context of social support that freedom can coexist with low levels of crime.

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Mark Colvin is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at George Mason University. His books include *Crime and Coercion*, *The Penitentiary in Crisis*, and *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs*. He has written several articles in the areas of criminological theory, prison violence, corrections, and labor markets and crime. His current research interests include the impact of coercion on crime and the effect of labor markets on neighborhood change and crime. Direct correspondence to Mark Colvin, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030. (E-mail: mcolvin@gmu.edu).

Francis T. Cullen is a Distinguished Research Professor of Criminal Justice and Sociology at the University of Cincinnati. He is a co-author of *Combating Corporate Crime: Local Prosecutors at Work*, *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*, and *Offender Rehabilitation: Effective Correctional Intervention*. His current research interests include the impact of social support on crime, the measurement of sexual victimization, and the principles of effective correctional rehabilitation programs.

Thomas Vander Ven is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Ohio University. He received his Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Cincinnati in 1998. His research interests include the study of work, family and crime, fear of crime, and criminological theory. His recent publications include articles in The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography and Social Problems.