

**PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND SELF-REPORTED  
DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR  
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**THESIS**

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**For My Sister Michelle**

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### The Problem

In recent months, teen violence has been all over the news. Children are being shot to death at school, and although it has decreased recently, violent juvenile crime is still very high in the United States (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999: p. 26). Is delinquency a natural part of growing up or is it a serious problem that society needs to address? The serious violent victimization rate for juveniles increased from 1985 to 1993 and then decreased to its lowest point of the decade in 1996 and longitudinal data from 1980 to 1996 show that males have consistently higher rates of victimization than females (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999: p. 26). Data show that juveniles are twice as likely as adults to be victims of serious violent crime and juveniles age 12-14 are more likely than older juveniles (15 to 17) to be victims of simple assault (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999: p. 26).

The 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) reports data on the delinquent behaviors of youth ages 12-16. The survey shows that delinquency varies significantly by such variables as age, sex, and ethnicity (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999: p. 58-59). There were some interesting findings

revealed in the survey. In relation to the above statement regarding recent school violence, 3% of children had carried a handgun in the month prior to the survey. It was also reported that “urban and rural youth reported participation in delinquency in equal proportions; however, urban youth were more likely to have smoked marijuana, to have run away from home, and to have been arrested” (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999: p. 58-59).

Longitudinal data were also collected from the survey. “Since 1980 the juvenile arrest rate for all offenses reached its highest point in 1996 and then declined 16% by 1999” (OJJDP website). “Overall, the juvenile arrest rate was 7% higher in 1999 than in 1980” (OJJDP website). More recently, in 1999, for juveniles ages 10-17, there were 7928 arrests for every 100,000 youths (OJJDP website).

These statistics and data are sufficient to warrant research into delinquency, its causes, and potential correlations with other variables. It has been said that delinquency and violation of norms is a normal and necessary part of any society. Deviance can establish boundaries that a society can place limitations and sanctions upon if they are violated. These boundaries and sanctions are necessary for the society to function properly. Is it necessary, however, for children, the most precious members of any society, to break these guidelines? Children are society’s investment in its future; the society will not sustain itself if children are corrupted before they become established adults. It is, therefore, necessary to examine elements of delinquency, connections to other variables, and possible solutions to this problem.

## **Review of the Literature**

Juvenile delinquency has been a focus of sociology for many years. Past theories and research have yielded many insights into the causes of, factors in, and solutions to this social phenomenon. Like history, however, our conceptions of the juvenile delinquent have changed through time. Popular past theories for explaining juvenile delinquency may seem to no longer apply, as today's delinquent is seen as much different from those in the past. Factors that were popular in explaining delinquency in the past may provide little more than an introduction to the explanation of today's delinquent. It will be argued that previously neglected factors must be examined to provide us with a better understanding of present juvenile delinquents. More specifically, the family and its components may play a greater role than previously thought.

There have been several popular theories for explaining juvenile delinquency. Each has contributed to sociology in its own specific way. A brief review of some of the competing theories is a necessary background for this research. Before the introduction and discussion of the theories, it is necessary to define delinquency and deviance, two of the most frequently used terms in this paper.

The most widely accepted definition of deviance is probably Albert K. Cohen's. He states that, "We define deviant behavior as behavior which violates institutionalized expectations--that is, expectations which are shared and recognized within a social system" (Cohen, 1959: p. 462).

Cloward and Ohlin's (1960: p. 3) definition of a delinquent act delineates the subject matter of this research. They state, "The delinquent act...is behavior that violates basic norms of the society, and, when officially known, it evokes a judgment by agents of criminal justice that such norms have been violated."

### **Strain or Anomie Theory**

When Robert K. Merton introduced anomie theory, it was a groundbreaking approach to deviance research. Built upon the ideas of Emile Durkheim, "anomie" or strain theory presupposes that, "social structures exert pressure on persons to engage in non conformist rather than conformist behavior" (Merton, 1938: p. 672).

*Anomie* is defined as a situation where individuals feel disconnected or detached from interaction—essentially a societal state dominated by normlessness (Durkheim, 1951: p. 256). Merton took this idea and applied it to how individuals adapt to situations in society (Merton, 1957: p. 157). He states that there are culturally-favored goals in every given society. For example, in the U.S., the desire for wealth is a culturally-favored goal (Merton, 1957: pp. 136-37). There are also legitimate means available to achieve these goals. When either the goals or means are accepted or rejected, different adaptations are created, some of which are considered deviant behavior (Merton, 1957: pp. 131-134). When the culturally-favored goals are unattainable through legitimate means,

strain or frustration is produced (Merton, 1957: p. 134). This can cause the disregard of norms resulting in deviance.

Not all groups in society have equal access to the legitimate means. Situations producing strain are seen most often in groups that do not have access, for whatever reason, to the legitimate means. These communities have excessive levels of anomie and lack the socially imposed restrictions on individual needs (Merton, 1957: p. 132).

There are five ways individuals can adapt in a given situation, and they are as follows: *conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion* (see Table 1). Conformity occurs when the culturally-favored goals are sought and the legitimate means are used. Innovation occurs when the culturally-favored goals are favored, and legitimate means are rejected. Ritualism occurs when the culturally-favored goals are not favored, but when legitimate means are still used. Retreatism occurs when culturally-favored goals are not favored, nor are legitimate means employed. Finally, rebellion is the adaptation in which the culturally-favored goals and legitimate means are rejected entirely and new ones are substituted in their place (Merton, 1957: pp. 141-156).

Each adaptation, save conformity, is considered a deviant response to the situation (Merton, 1957: p. 141). Deviance and delinquency are seen often in innovation. Situations where individuals are unable to achieve the culturally-favored goals for economic, social, cultural, or familial reasons may use illegitimate means to achieve them or they may simply reject the goals. Either is deviant. Incentives for success are provided by the established values of culture,

but the avenues for moving toward the established goals are limited by class structure. It is the combination of culture and social structure that produces an intense pressure for deviation (Merton, 1957: p. 145).

Deviance can also be found in ritualism. Those persons who reject the culturally-favored goal of wealth and do not wish to get ahead in the world are surely a departure from the cultural model of advancement (Merton, 1957: p. 150). Individuals using the ritualism adaptation tend to exhibit status anxiety and are generally-prevalent in the lower middle class (Merton, 1957: p. 151).

Retreatism is also deviant, but is the least common of the adaptations (Merton, 1957: p. 153). These are the aliens of society, the drug users, alcoholics, and the dropouts (Merton, 1957: p. 153). They have relinquished the culturally-favored goals and their behavior is not consistent with the norms supporting means (Merton, 1957: p. 153). Finally, deviance is also found in rebellion.

These adaptations put the dominant values in question, form alliances outside the legitimate system, and break down the solidarity and unity of the prevailing group (Merton, 1957: pp. 156-157). These are situations in which individuals try to change society.

Strain theory was popular in the past and has been modified over the years by sociologists. Some proponents have used it to focus on delinquency predominately found in the lower classes. Cohen explains this using the concept of the "middle class measuring rod" (Cohen, 1955: p. 88). This concept explains how working class children are unable to live up the expectations of the desired American virtues put forth by the middle class. The middle class ethic contains

nine basic principles: (1) Ambition; (2) Individualism; (3) Cultivation and possession of skills; (4) Worldly asceticism; (5) Rationality; (6) Manners and courtesy; (7) Control of physical aggression; (8) Constructive recreation; (9) Respect for property (Cohen, 1955: p. 88-91). These middle class values are construed to be dominant American values by American society. Middle class teachers expect students to act according to these principles and these actions are what middle class American society expects. When a child fails to live up to these ideals, for whatever reason, he or she experiences strain and frustration. Some children see that the dominant American middle class values are unattainable, so they turn to delinquent behavior. Cohen asserts this idea to explain how working class children have difficulty attaining the middle class ideals.

Working class children suffer from ambivalence toward middle class standards. Working class children desperately want to achieve these standards, but at the same time they reject them because they are unattainable. These children then reject the middle class ethic and turn to another—that of the delinquent subculture (Cohen, 1955: p. 95). The delinquent subculture is a way to deal with failure to achieve the middle class ideal. This is why many of the lower class delinquents are chronic offenders. The failure to achieve the middle class ideal causes a compulsion to reject the middle class ideal. Working class children, therefore, substitute new goals that can be attained.

The creation of a delinquent subculture is a reaction to the middle class ethic and values (Cohen, 1955: pp. 128-130). Cohen explains that, "The process

of becoming a delinquent is the same as becoming a Boy Scout. The difference lies only in the cultural pattern with which the child associates” (Cohen, 1955: p. 14). Here Cohen is referring to the delinquent subculture which ties in with the next theory of delinquency: differential association.

### **Differential Association Theory**

Differential association theory was developed by Sutherland as another way to explain criminal behavior. Differential association theory hypothesizes that delinquency results not from the influence of mass media or independent of others in society, but rather within intimate personal groups such as family and friends. The more intimate the personal group, the more influence the group has on behavior. For example, children with delinquent friends are more likely to be delinquent than children without delinquent friends (Sutherland and Cressy, 1966: p. 85).

Sutherland’s differential association theory has eight hypotheses that can be summarized in a few sentences (Sutherland, 1956: pp. 8-10). Delinquency is learned through communication within intimate personal groups. Within these personal groups, delinquents learn techniques, motives, rationalizations, and attitudes that are defined as good or bad by society in law. An excess of definitions unfavorable to society rather than favorable define delinquent behavior. Delinquent associations vary in frequency, duration, priority, and

intensity and help to explain the effects of differential associations (Sutherland, 1956: p.10).

While differential association and anomie theories offer explanations of delinquent behavior, each is limited in its ability to be tested. It is difficult to measure causation of delinquency using any of these theories. There is, however, a theory that assumes the tendency toward delinquency and attempts to explain not why are children delinquent, but why aren't more children delinquent? –

### **Control Theory**

Social control theory explains deviance by reference to the bond of the individual to the social elements of society. Developed by Hirschi (1969), this theory attempts to examine how individuals bond to conventional elements in society. It assumes that the stronger the bonds to conventional elements in society, the less likely an individual will be to engage in delinquent behavior (Hirschi, 1969: p. 16).

Hirschi states that delinquency results when an individual's bonds with society are weak or broken (Hirschi, 1969: p. 3). Elements of the individual's bond with society are: *attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief*. Attachment refers to the psychological and emotional connection one feels toward other persons or groups and the extent to which one cares about their opinions and feelings (Shoemaker, 1984: p. 164). Attachment to different parts

of society strengthens an individual's bond to it. Individuals are, therefore, less likely to engage in delinquent behavior if they are attached to the parts of society. The essence of internalization of norms lies in the attachment to others. Durkheim said, "We are moral beings to the extent that we are social beings" (Durkheim, 1961: p. 64).

Commitment to conventional bonds also deters delinquency. Commitment refers to the investments accumulated in terms of conformity to conventional rules versus the estimated costs associated with nonconformity (Shoemaker, 1984: p. 165). If a juvenile has invested time and energy in getting an education, he or she is less likely to commit delinquent acts. As part of a society, some acquire goods and reputations that they would not want to risk losing. Children who weigh the costs and risks, and calculate what actions are in their best interests, are less likely to commit a delinquent act. Ambition and aspiration play very important roles in producing conformity, and those who do not have a stake in these are more likely to commit a delinquent act. The greater the commitment to conventional forms of behavior, the greater the commitment to conformity (Hirschi, 1969: p. 162).

Involvement in conventional activities also reduces the risk of committing delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969: pp. 21-22). Involvement is similar to commitment, but a more straightforward element. Involvement is simply a matter of available time within a day; it refers to participation in conventional and legitimate activity (Shoemaker, 1984: p. 165). Individuals who are involved in conventional behavior have less time to commit delinquent acts. Individuals are tied to

classes, lessons, and work, therefore, are too busy to be involved in delinquency. Leisure time of adolescents models Veblen's concept of the leisure class (Matza and Sykes, 1961: p. 715). This leisure time is conducive to delinquency with regard to the sets of values. If the leisure time is, however, spent "productively" then individuals will be less often faced with the temptation to commit delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969: pp. 22-23).

Belief in the rules of society also decreases the likelihood of involvement in delinquency (Hirschi, 1969: p. 23). Belief is the acceptance of a conventional value system (Shoemaker, 1984: p. 165). Individuals are socialized, perhaps imperfectly, into a group whose rules they may violate. Delinquents not only believe the rules of society, but they believe in the rules as they are violating them. This idea somewhat alludes to strain theory in that delinquents use illegitimate means to achieve the culturally-favored goals. Delinquents know the rules of society, but still break them. An individual, however, who is bonded more strongly to the rules will be less likely to break them (Hirschi, 1969: p. 26). Beliefs mean little without the other elements of the bond. The less the attachment, commitment, or involvement in society, the more likely an individual is not to believe in many of society's rules (Hirschi, 1969: p. 26).

The discussion above of bonds is not limited to society alone, since there are many elements of society to which a person is bonded. Durkheim states that the bonds to nation, humanity, and family, in that order, are the most important (Durkheim, 1961: p. 83). Hirschi disagrees and hypothesizes that no bond is

more important than any other. For example, parents, peers, and school are all equally important bonds for individuals (Hirschi, 1969: p. 31).

The element paramount to this study is attachment and it will be examined in more detail. Hirschi states that individuals can be attached to three major groups in society: parents, peers, and school (Hirschi, 1969: pp. 83, 110, 135). The groups are not separate from each other but must be examined separately to delve into the details of each. In Hirschi's research, he separates these groups and the researcher will do the same (Hirschi, 1969: pp. 83, 110, 135). School will be examined first, peers second, and finally parents, as the parental bond is the crux of this study.

### **Attachment and School**

The more attached children are to the institution of school, the less likely they are to commit delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969: p. 110). Referring back to Cohen's concept of the middle class measuring rod, schools have long been a middle class institution (Cohen, 1955: p. 119; Hirschi, 1969: p. 110). It is, therefore, important to understand the impact of school upon the lower class child. Many of the values and goals that school presents are of little interest to the lower class child (Hirschi, 1969: p. 110). Delinquents within the institution are not involved in conventional activities, nor do they believe in the conventional rules. Lack of involvement and belief in conventions are both characteristics of children from lower classes, but they do not apply solely to them. Delinquents

from middle class backgrounds also display these broken bonds (Welsh, Green, and Jenkins, 1999: p. 74).

Adolescents more likely to commit delinquent acts also have generally lower levels of intelligence or academic competence (Hirschi, 1969: p. 111). Those with poor academic or interpersonal skills experience failure or alienation in school, and thus become detached from school (Welsh et al, 1999: p. 74). This is not to say that just because certain children are not smart, they will become delinquent. It means that many of the bonds or attachments a child makes within school have to do with learning and socialization. The school is an institution for learning, but it is also the place where a child meets and interacts with many other children. If children feel ostracized in a classroom and unattached to the school, they will be more likely to form friendships with others in their similar situation (Hirschi, 1969: p 117). Children in similar situations will be children who are unattached to school and have found little purpose in the institution of school.

Hirschi also states that the better a child does in school, the less likely he or she is to commit delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969: p. 115). Children who perceive themselves as competent and capable are more likely to embrace school and see its potential benefits. These children will be more likely to participate in school activities and enjoy the school atmosphere. These children are less likely to have committed delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969: pp. 111-113). However, children who have committed delinquent acts report that they do not like school and feel little or no attachment to the institution itself, the teachers, or

anything it stands for. Perhaps their aspirations are blocked as strain theory suggests, or they simply find no associations with peers who are committed to school (Hirschi, 1969: p. 125).

There are many theorists who attempt to link the attachment to school with the likelihood of committing delinquent acts. One study hypothesized that children from bad neighborhoods and communities are less likely to be attached to school. The study, however, found that there is no evidence linking bad neighborhoods to school disorder or attachment to school (Welsh et al, 1999: p 106). Socioeconomic status was found to play the biggest part in school delinquency and individual student characteristics such as the belief in rules and effort exerted a strong influence on the attachment to school (Welsh et al, 1999: p. 107). Thus, poor neighborhoods failed to predict attachment to school and school disorder (Welsh et al, 1999: p. 107).

Another study on delinquency was conducted on a large number of urban and rural children and did find that those children who were more attached to their school were less delinquent than those who were not (Vowell and Howell, 1998: p. 370). Another conclusion in the same study was that those children who perceive neighborhood deterioration were less attached to their school. This was the case for urban youths and less for rural youths (Vowell and Howell, 1998: p. 390). The research supports the hypothesis that delinquents are less likely to be attached to school (Vowell and Howell, 1998: p. 379). Conversely, children who are attached to school are less likely to commit delinquent acts. However, what is not known is which comes first.

## **Attachment and Peers**

Juveniles can also be attached to their friends or peers. It has been suggested that association with and learning from peers contributes to delinquency. Control theory also addresses this idea. Hirschi states that most delinquent acts are committed with others; delinquents have delinquent friends (Hirschi, 1969: p. 135). Glueck and Glueck (1950: p. 164), however, argue that companionship with delinquents is a by-product of delinquency. It is called the birds-of-a-feather-flock-together approach to looking at delinquent peers (Glueck and Glueck, 1950: p. 164). Children whose attachment and commitment to society are high do not befriend children whose stake in society is low. Children seek out friends with similar ideas and interests the same way many other youth groups are formed. So essentially there are two different views: first, delinquent friends cause delinquency and second, delinquent friends are a by-product of the real causes of delinquency (Hirschi, 1969: p. 137). Children from lower classes, therefore, tend to possess characteristics that lead them to have delinquent friendships.

Hirschi tested the idea that delinquency is caused by having delinquent friends and came up with no data to support this idea (Hirschi, 1969: pp. 159-161). Attachment to teachers and parents are far more likely to have an effect on delinquent behavior. Control theory will argue that delinquency is not caused by having delinquent friends, but rather a result of a child's lack of bonds to conventional society (Hirschi, 1969). In a recent study, researchers found that

juveniles who have both delinquent and non-delinquent friends exhibit different relationships with each of them (Marcus, 1996: p. 155). The relationships with delinquent friends are characterized by greater conflict, poor attachment quality, lesser ability to repair relationships, and poorer social-cognitive problem solving (Marcus, 1996: p 155). This again lends support to the idea that those who are delinquent will seek out the friendships of others like them. If a child does not get along well with his delinquent friends, they are less likely to be attached to them.

Another study, however, found quite different results (Aseltine, 1995: p. 116). The researcher found a significant correlation between peers and delinquency, while attachment to society and parents were only weakly related. The researchers believe that this was due to a sampling technique that overstated the respondents' perceptions of their friends' behaviors (Aseltine, 1995: pp. 116-117). Another researcher, too, found friends to be important to delinquency. He states that peers are instigators of delinquency and parents, or time spent with them, can be negators of delinquency (Warr, 1993: p. 262). So in essence, there is still debate about the effect of delinquent peers, and although there is evidence to support the delinquent peers hypothesis, another element of control theory will now be discussed: attachment to parents.

## **Attachment and Parents**

There are many ideas about why, and in what ways, delinquency is affected by attachment to parents. Whether the relationship is simply communication, actual amount of time spent together, or the intimacy of the relationship, attachment to parents is a deterrent to delinquency (Jang and Smith, 1997: p. 327; Hirschi, 1969: p. 88; Sokol-Katz, Dunham, and Zimmerman, 1997: p. 212; Warr, 1993: p. 262). Parents are seen as conventional people in society and attachment to conventional people is a major deterrent to delinquency. The emotional bond between parents and children is an avenue for relaying norms, values, and expectations. If that bond is severed or weakened, then the child is more likely to turn elsewhere for direction. If a child is not sufficiently socialized by his parents to the norms of society, then a child is more likely to accept delinquent norms and ideas (Hirschi, 1969: p. 86). Bowlby believed that there is a strong case for believing that a child separated from his or her parents for the first five years is a cause of delinquent character development (Wooten, 1959: p. 41). Other researchers, however, found no empirical evidence to support this hypothesis (McCord and McCord, 1959: p. 83; Nye, 1958: p. 47). Children whose homes are “broken” later in life are just as likely to have committed delinquent acts as those whose homes were “broken” in the first five years (McCord and McCord, 1959: p. 83; Nye, 1958: p. 47).

Direct parental control appears to have little effect on delinquency since most delinquent acts are committed outside the home and take relatively little

time. What is important, however, is whether the parent is psychologically present with the child (Hirschi, 1969: p. 88). If there has been proper socialization and the child is attached to his or her parents (meaning the child would not want to disappoint them) then the child is less likely to commit a delinquent act. If no thought to the parents is given, it is hypothesized that a child will be more likely to commit a delinquent act (Hirschi, 1969: p. 88). This refers to the term, "virtual supervision," meaning children who perceive their parents as unaware of their whereabouts are more likely to commit delinquent acts. Hirschi tested this and found that there is attachment not because of actual restrictions, but rather because the conventional children participate in activities with their parents (Hirschi, 1969: pp. 88-89).

Other researchers conducted a study that found family attachment to have the biggest effect on delinquency (Sokol-Katz et al, 1997: p. 212). Delinquency was not necessarily a result of the family structure, but rather the attachment to any family (Sokol-Katz et al, 1997: p. 212). This was not found to be the case in another recent study of delinquents already incarcerated. The researchers found very close ties and attachment to family, but this is most likely the result of 70 percent of the parents also incarcerated (Knight and Tripodi, 1996: pp. 123-125). Thus, children in the Juvenile Justice System were more likely to be attached to their parents who, coincidentally, were also in the Adult Criminal Justice System. Other researchers conducted research on the topic of perceived supervision and affective ties between parents and children (Jang and Smith, 1997: p 325). They found that affective ties to children were more of a result of delinquency rather

than a cause of delinquency. They found a strong negative correlation between perceived family supervision (i.e. time spent together) and delinquency (Jang and Smith, 1997: p 327). There are some differences in attachment to parents across races as well. One researcher found that family identity and attachment was the strongest for whites and Hispanics, while the female head of the household was the strongest attachment for blacks. Logically, adolescents who are allowed to roam free of parental supervision are more likely to commit delinquent acts for whites, blacks, and Hispanics. Hispanics were also found to have the closest intimacy on communication with their parents with regard to delinquency (Weber, Miracle, and Skehan, 1995: pp. 370-371). Results from other recent studies have yielded similar results (Costello and Vowell, 1999: p. 834).

### **Hypotheses**

What are the implications of previous delinquency research? What, then, is the present research trying to uncover? Based on the previous research stated, there will be an attempt to find a correlation between attachment to parents and the self-reporting of delinquent behavior. It is also hypothesized that family structure (operationalized as number of parents in the household when the child was growing up) and family time spent together are factors in self-reported delinquent behavior. This research is based on control theory and those that are more attached to parents will be less likely to report delinquent behavior. Along

with parents, the attachment to society and commitment to conventional goals and norms will be tested. The research will also test, updated for the present, whether children from lower socioeconomic statuses are more delinquent than those from high socioeconomic statuses. The hypotheses are as follows:

1. Children from two parent households report less delinquent behavior than those from one-parent households.
2. Children who report spending more time with their parents will report less delinquent behavior.
3. The stronger the sense of social responsibility, the less reported involvement in delinquent behavior.
4. The higher the socioeconomic status, the less the involvement in reported delinquent behavior.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Data Collection**

The questionnaire was distributed to 191 students in five different Southwest Texas State University undergraduate classes. This sample is a non-random convenient sample. Students were asked to participate by filling out the questionnaire and did so according to the directions on the cover sheet attached to the questionnaire. When all the questionnaires were completed and returned, the answers were coded numerically in order to perform statistical analysis using SPSS.

#### **Instrument Construction**

Data were collected using a questionnaire because it was the most efficient way to collect delinquency data with a large sample (see Appendix). The questionnaires were distributed and collected by a completely anonymous process, given the sensitive nature of the questions. Descriptive and demographic questions made up the first part of the questionnaire. Questions designed to elicit information regarding the hypotheses were also included.

Questions specifically targeting the respondents' family were key because the primary hypotheses test family in relation to delinquency.

In this study, socioeconomic status is measured through reported income. Respondents were asked to provide their family's average income while they were in high school. Respondents were also asked to state whether their family's standard of living increased, decreased, or stayed the same over their lifetime.

In order to measure respondents' family structure, respondents were asked whether they grew up in a home that had two parents the majority of the time. This question, used to test hypothesis one, specified only whether there were two parents (step or biological) in the house when the respondent was growing up. Rather than ask respondents to retrospectively evaluate their feelings about their relationship with their parents, I simply asked for the number of parents. It was thought that this would yield the most accurate results given the non-random sample.

The question regarding time spent with parents was used to test hypothesis two. Respondents were asked to select a given amount (very little, some, or a great deal) of time spent with their parents in a typical high week while in high school. A five-question family attachment scale was also included in the instrument. The scale was taken from Hirschi's larger scales measuring parental attachment (Hirschi, 1969: p. 283-284). It was hoped that five questions would be sufficient to grasp the respondents' parental attachment, given that the respondents were limited to the time constraints of a class period.

In order to measure social attachment, an anomie scale was included in the questionnaire. The scale was taken from Srole's (Srole, 1956: p. 716) study on anomie. The scale is a standard Likert scale with a low score operationally representing high levels of anomie. Since hypothesis three addressed social attachment, a high score on the anomie scale operationally represents a high degree of social attachment.

The most important scale used in the questionnaire is the self-reported delinquency scale. Respondents were asked whether they had committed various delinquent acts while in high school. This scale was taken from Dr. Donna Barnes of the SWT faculty. Respondents were not asked how many times they committed each behavior, but simply whether they had committed each one during high school. Although each question in the scale was given equal weight, some delinquency is expected in each respondent. The researcher believes that serious and chronic delinquent respondents will have a much higher score than generally non-delinquent respondents. Operationally, therefore, the greater the number of YES responses, the more delinquent the respondent.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Frequency distributions were performed for every relevant variable to determine the mean, range, and percentage of each. In order to test hypothesis 1, the mean number of delinquent responses for respondents from one-parent families was compared to the mean number for respondents from two-parent

families. To test hypothesis two, the mean number of delinquent responses for respondents who reported spending very little time with their parents was compared to the mean number for respondents who reported spending some time with their parents and the mean number of respondents for respondents who reported spending a great deal of time with their parents. In order to test hypothesis 3, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to measure strength and direction of the relationship between reported delinquency and social attachment. To test hypothesis 4, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between reported delinquency and income. The researcher set  $\alpha = .05$  for all statistical procedures.

## CHAPTER 3

### FINDINGS

#### Characteristics of the Sample

There were a total of 191 respondents to the questionnaire (N=191). The ages of the respondents ranged from 17 to 50 with greater than 75% between the ages of 18 and 21. This is expected since this was a sample of undergraduate college students. There was an unequal balance between males and females. Only 43% of the respondents were male. Over 70% of the respondents were Anglo, with the next most often reported ethnicity being Hispanic. Over 85% of the respondents grew up in two-parent households. About 50% of the respondents reported spending "some" time with their parents and the remaining 50% were split evenly between spending "very little" and "a great deal" of time with their parents. Over 90% of the respondents reported that their family's income stayed the same or increased during the course of their high school years. The reported family incomes of the respondents were fairly evenly distributed with more than 30% of respondents reporting incomes greater than \$80,000. The overwhelming majority of respondents reported participating in at least one delinquent behavior while in high school. Nearly 95% of respondents participated in at least one delinquent act and over 75% reported 4 or more

behaviors (see table 2). 10 respondents reported committing no delinquent behaviors and 1 respondent reported committing all 15 on the scale. Almost 13% of respondents were arrested, 68% reported having sexual intercourse, 85% reported consuming alcohol, and almost 50% reported consuming illegal drugs.

### **Test Of Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1 states that children from two-parent families would report less delinquency than children from one-parent families. This hypothesis is rejected. Over 85% of the respondents grew up in two-parent households and actually reported more delinquency than children from one-parent households (see Table 3). In other words, the hypothesis was rejected, and produced results in the opposite direction originally hypothesized. Children from two-parent households reported an average of 6.4 delinquent behaviors and children from one-parent families reported an average of just 4.9 behaviors. The mean difference was statistically significant at the .05 level.

Hypothesis 2 states that children who report spending more time with their parents would report fewer delinquent behaviors. This hypothesis is not rejected. Children who reported spending very little time with their parents reported an average of 7.1 delinquent behaviors (see Table 4). Children who reported spending some time with their parents reported an average of 6 delinquent behaviors. Children who reported spending a great deal of time with their

parents reported an average of 5.5 delinquent behaviors. The only statistically significant difference, however, is between respondents who reported “very little” and “a great deal” of time with their parents. This difference is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Hypothesis 3 states that the stronger an individual’s sense of social responsibility, the less the reported involvement in delinquent behavior. This hypothesis is rejected. There is a weak negative correlation between reported delinquency and social attachment (-.02), but this relationship is not statistically significant (see Table 5).

Hypothesis 4 states that the higher the socioeconomic status, the less reported involvement in delinquent behavior. This hypothesis is rejected. This is a weak positive correlation (.04) between socioeconomic status and reported delinquent behavior (see Table 5). This means as socioeconomic status increased, reported involvement in delinquent behavior increased. This relationship, however, is not statistically significant.

### **Other Findings**

In the course of analyzing the data with reference to other variables, interesting results, unrelated to the hypotheses, were found. Individuals who were more attached to their parents, or scored higher on the parental attachment scale, reported fewer delinquent behaviors (see Table 5). This correlation, however, was not statistically significant. When time spent with parents was

broken down by sex, some interesting results were found. Males who report spending “a great deal” and “very little” time with their parents reported greater numbers of delinquent behaviors. In this bimodal finding, the “very little” answer is consistent with the hypothesis and research, but the “a great deal” respondents were very surprising (see Table 7). When this relationship was examined further, gender was found to explain the difference in reported delinquency rather than the interaction between gender and time spent with parents (see Table 8).

Those who showed no political party preference reported the least amount of delinquent behavior, followed by those individuals who chose Republican. The most delinquent responses were found among those individuals who checked Independent. These differences between means were statistically significant. Past assumptions regarding gender differences in reported delinquency held to be true as males reported more delinquent behaviors than females (means of 6.9 and 5.6 respectively). The difference is statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 6).

Delinquency and ethnicity was not examined in this research. Given the unique geographic setting of the research, an examination of ethnicity in relation to delinquency would be ineffective. Since the data were a non-random convenience sample, over 70% of the respondents were Anglo and the next most common ethnicity was Hispanic (over 13%). Less than 5% of the respondents were African American. Absolute numbers of respondents in minority

classifications would not yield significant differences in reported delinquent behaviors.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Methodological Problems

There are some problems with the methods used in this study that need to be addressed. The first problem is the sample was not randomly selected. Statistical procedures used in calculating the data are designed for random samples; therefore, caution should be used when making inferences about the findings. This also limits the ability to generalize the results to the larger population.

Another problem is the use of self-reported data in place of actual behaviors. The researcher asked the respondents to remember behaviors, and did not directly count or witness the behaviors. The Delinquency Scale did not measure actual delinquent behaviors, but rather respondents' self-reports of each of the behaviors. Even with the respondents' anonymity guaranteed, there could have been an underreporting of delinquent acts due to perceived negative consequences. If the respondents reported committing serious delinquent acts, then they may have been afraid of legal retribution. Although there is no hard evidence to support this belief, any underreporting could damage the reliability of the findings.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The primary focus of this research was to test whether family was the strongest predictor of delinquency. It was believed, and supported in the literature review, that family attachment in its many operationally defined forms, would prove to be a strong predictor of delinquent behavior. Hypothesis 1 did not support this line of reasoning. The sample was very skewed with the overwhelming majority of children coming from homes with two parents present. Therefore, only 28 questionnaires from children from one-parent families were submitted. The data showed that children from two-parent families were more likely to report delinquent behavior than children from one-parent families. Under optimum conditions, the researcher would like to gather data directly from high school students and be able to obtain many different measures of their families as Hirschi (1969) did with the Richmond Project.

Hypothesis 2, however, was not rejected and came out in the correct direction. The results were statistically significant. This means there is a difference between those children who report spending more time with their parents with regard to reported delinquent acts. These data support Hirschi's (1969) and especially Warr's (1993) results from previous research. Children who spend more time with their parents are more attached to them. Replication and support for these past studies shows that children today still need guidance by and attachment to conventional figures in society. For most children, these conventional figures will be parents. Parents need to take the time to share

activities with their children and become involved in their lives. This research, and studies from the past, shows that this time spent with children will “pay off” in less delinquency when a child is presented with a decision to commit a delinquent act. Virtual parental supervision will affect whether or not a child will commit a delinquent act. Even in modern times, when two parent families are less common, one-parent families where parents spend time with their children deter a child’s reported delinquent behavior.

Hypothesis 3 was rejected because there was very little correlation between attachment to society and reported delinquent behavior. Perhaps this is due in part to the verbiage of the anomie scale. Some of the phrases were a little outdated and respondents may have misinterpreted the wording.

Hypothesis 4 was rejected because there was little correlation between socioeconomic status and reported delinquency. Many of the respondents came from homes with family incomes of greater than \$80,000. This is not surprising since it is a sample of college students. Students in college are more likely to come from affluent backgrounds and more seriously delinquent individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses were grossly underrepresented.

Attachment to family was not significantly correlated with reported delinquent behavior. This is perhaps caused by the delinquency scale’s weighting of behaviors. Each behavior was given equal weight in the delinquency scale, but it can be argued that some behaviors are more serious than others. When, however, only the most serious criminal behaviors were counted, the results were the same. It was also suggested that the number of

times each delinquent act was committed should have been recorded. This would have been difficult for the respondents since the behaviors were committed during high school.

Even though only one of the hypotheses not rejected, this research is considered successful. Most importantly, it was found that children who spend more time with their parents would report less delinquent behavior. The parents are the most important negators of delinquency and good familial relations will negate negative contact with delinquents as discussed in Warr's (1993: p. 262) research. Parents then need to take a more active role in what their child is doing, especially during the critical high school years. At a time when most adolescents are rebelling against the ideas and institution of family, it is important to understand that this is normal. Even if adolescents don't like it, some time should be set aside each week to discuss how things are going in the child's life. Take some time out each day to discuss this, have a sit down dinner and talk about the children's day, or spend some time each weekend doing something together that the adolescent enjoys. These steps can decrease the likelihood of a child becoming involved in delinquent behavior.

I believe that above all, parents are the most important conventional figures in a child's life. The teenage years are awkward for all children and parents must expect some degree of rebellion and secession. It is important, however, for parents not to get frustrated and give up spending all time with their children, and must avoid "letting them figure it out on their own." Leaving them to experience these imminent changes by themselves weakens the parental bond

and alienates children even further. In the absence of genuine parental guidance, children will seek alternative forms of attachment. This is why the positive parental role model is so important, to negate the impending delinquent relationships with peers.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

If this research were repeated, there would have to be some changes made to the hypotheses and to the methods of collecting data. Instead of using students at a university and asking them to remember high school, it would be optimum to go to high schools and pass out surveys. A random sample of high school students was original goal of the researcher, but the researcher found this difficult to accomplish. Most important to this research, it must be recognized that the sample in this study was a non-random sample. The results, therefore, cannot be generalized to the larger population.

The question regarding reported income was also difficult for the respondents to gauge. There were a number of respondents who left the question blank or who didn't know their family's income. A better measure of income and socioeconomic status should be used in further research. Reported income should be broken down into smaller ranges, and with a larger random sample, would produce a more accurate assessment of respondents' socioeconomic status.

The questions regarding political party preference and voter registration were included solely because the questionnaire was created during an election year and it was fresh in the researcher's mind. No attention was paid to ethnicity and delinquency in this research, so perhaps this can be examined in further research. Once again, the non-random sample would not have produced significant differences.

The mean number of delinquent responses supports claims that delinquency is prevalent in the sample, but research in all areas of delinquency should be continued and other factors not addressed in this research should also be tested.

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**APPENDIX**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Questionnaire

PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex: \_\_\_\_\_
3. With what ethnicity do you most closely identify?  
 I identify with no one ethnicity  
 Anglo  
 Black  
 Hispanic  
 Asian  
 Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. When you were growing up, did you have two parents (step or biological) in the household the majority of the time?  
 Yes  
 No
5. During high school, in an average week, how much time did you spend talking, working, or playing with your parents?  
 Very little  
 Some  
 A great deal
6. With what political party do you most closely identify?  
 No preference  
 Democratic  
 Republican  
 Independent  
 Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are you registered to vote?  
 Yes  
 No
8. Which of the following best describes your family's standard of living during your lifetime:  
 Our standard of living declined as I got older.  
 Our standard of living stayed the same as I got older.  
 Our standard of living got better as I got older.

9. During high school, what was your family's average yearly income?

\_\_\_ Less than \$20,000

\_\_\_ \$20,000-\$29,999

\_\_\_ \$30,000-\$39,999

\_\_\_ \$40,000-\$49,999

\_\_\_ \$50,000-\$59,999

\_\_\_ \$60,000-\$69,999

\_\_\_ \$70,000-\$79,999

\_\_\_ \$80,000 or greater

Please circle the appropriate response to the right for the activities you participated in during high school.

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Get arrested?  | Yes | No |
| 2. Break into a place?  | Yes | No |
| 3. Shoplift?  | Yes | No |
| 4. Steal something worth less than \$100?                     | Yes | No |
| 5. Steal something worth more than \$100?                     | Yes | No |
| 6. Beat up or hurt someone on purpose?                        | Yes | No |
| 7. Get into fistfights?                                       | Yes | No |
| 8. Ruin, break, or damage someone else's property on purpose? | Yes | No |
| 9. Take a car without the owner's permission?                 | Yes | No |
| 10. Have sexual intercourse?                                  | Yes | No |
| 11. Violate curfew?   | Yes | No |
| 12. Skip school?  | Yes | No |
| 13. Defy parents?   | Yes | No |
| 14. Consume alcohol?  | Yes | No |
| 15. Consume illegal drugs?                                    | Yes | No |

Below are some statements about various subjects. Read each statement and select a response from the list below that best describes how you feel about the statement. Write the appropriate number in the space to the left of each statement to indicate your response.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

1. \_\_\_ Most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average person.
2. \_\_\_ Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.
3. \_\_\_ In spite of what people say, the lot of the average person is getting worse, not better.
4. \_\_\_ It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future.
5. \_\_\_ These days a person doesn't really know whom he can count on.
6. \_\_\_ Most people really don't care what happens to the next person.
7. \_\_\_ Next to health, money is the most important thing in life.
8. \_\_\_ You sometimes can't help wondering whether anything is worthwhile.
9. \_\_\_ To make money there are no right and wrong ways anymore, only easy and hard ways.

Below are some statements about your family. Read each statement and select a response from the list below that best describes how you feel about the statement. Write the appropriate number in the space to the left of each statement to indicate your response.

1. Often
2. Sometimes
3. Rarely

1. \_\_\_ Have you felt unwanted by your parents?
2. \_\_\_ Do your parents ask you how you are doing in school?
3. \_\_\_ Do your parents check to see whether you have done what they tell you to do?
4. \_\_\_ Do your parents seem to understand you?
5. \_\_\_ Do you share your thoughts and feelings with your parents?

Table 1. A Typology of Modes of Individual Adaptation.

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Modes of Adaptation	Culture Goals	Institutionalized Means
Conformity	+	+
Innovation	+	-
Ritualism	-	+
Retreatism	-	-
Rebellion	<u>±</u>	<u>±</u>

+ Represents acceptance

- Represents rejection

± Represents rejection and substitution

(Merton, 1957: p. 140)

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents who Reported Committing Each Delinquent Act.

Delinquent Act	Percentage
Consume alcohol	85
Violate curfew	79
Skip school	73
Defy parents	71
Have sexual intercourse	68
Consume illegal drugs	50
Steal something worth less than \$100	37
Shoplift	31
Ruin, break, or damage someone else's property on purpose	31
Get into fistfights	25
Beat up or hurt someone on purpose	20
Break into a place	16
Get Arrested	13
Take a car without the owner's permission	10
Steal something worth more than \$100	6

N=191

Table 3. Mean Number of Delinquent Behaviors Reported by Whether or Not the Respondent Grew Up in a Two-Parent Household.

<u>Two-Parent Household</u>	<u>Number of Delinquent Behaviors</u>		
	Number	Mean	Difference in Means
Yes	162	6.41	1.52*
No	28	4.89	
Total	190	6.18	

\*P<.05  
F=5.56

Table 4. Mean Number Delinquent Behaviors Reported by Amount of Time Spent With Parents.

<u>Amount of Time</u>	<u>Number of Delinquent Behaviors</u>		
	Number	Mean	Difference in Means
Very Little	47	7.12	
Some	93	6.06	1.62*
A Great Deal	48	5.50	
Total	188	6.18	

\*P<.05

F=3.20

Difference between Very Little and A Great Deal

Table 5. Pearson Correlations Between Delinquency of Respondents, Income, Social Attachment, and Family Attachment.

	Delinquency Scale	Income	Social Attachment	Family Attachment
Delinquency Scale	-	.04	-.02	-.13
Income	-	-	.21*	.13
Social Attachment	-	-	-	.20*
Family Attachment	-	-	-	-

\*P<.05

Table 6. Mean Number of Delinquent Behaviors Reported by Gender of Respondent.

<u>Gender</u>	Number	<u>Number of Delinquent Behaviors</u>	
		Mean	Difference in Means
Male	82	6.94	1.33*
Female	108	5.61	
Total	190	6.18	

\*P<.05  
F=8.47

Table 7. Mean Number of Delinquent Behaviors Reported by Gender and Time Spent with Parents.

<u>Time Spent With Parents</u>	<u>Gender of Respondent</u>					
	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Very Little	25	7.72	22	6.41	47	7.11
Some	36	6.36	57	5.88	93	6.06
A Great Deal	19	7.05	29	4.48	48	5.50
Total	80	6.95	108	5.61	188	6.18

Table 8. Analysis of Variance, Number of Delinquent Behaviors By Gender of Respondent and Time Spent with Parents.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F
Main Effects	131.892	3	43.964	4.596*
Gender	68.122	1	68.122	7.121*
Time Spent	49.508	2	24.754	2.588
Gender and Time Spent	32.966	2	16.483	1.723
Explained	164.858	5	32.972	3.447
Residual	1740.993	182	9.566	
Total	1905.851	187	10.192	

\*P<.05

## VITA

Ryan MacDonald was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1975, the son of Nancy Lew MacDonald and Roderick Norman MacDonald. After completing his work at Grapevine High School, Grapevine, Texas, in 1994, he entered University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado. He then transferred to the University of Texas in Arlington, Texas, in 1995 and again to the University of Texas in Austin, Texas, 1996. He received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Texas in December, 1998. During the following year he was employed as a technical writer and web content specialist for Zip2 Corporation in Mountain View, California and drkoop.com in Austin, Texas. In August, 1999, he entered the Graduate School of Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas. He worked as an Instructional Assistant for the Department of Sociology in the Fall, 2000 and the Spring, 2001.

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