Introduction to an Assigned Reading


You can skip: material on behavioral genetics (47-63), and white collar crime (180-201)

The Most Key Points in the Book
You want to clearly understand why this theory is needed. What is “wrong” with other criminological theories? What specific problems do they hope to solve. Be clear on the distinction between criminal behavior and criminalistic tendencies. You want to spend considerable time reflecting on the extent to which you believe there are general criminalistic tendencies that vary across people, and whether they are developed and fixed at a young age and relatively stable for the rest of one’s life. You need to have an opinion about this matter.

You also need to reflect on where you stand with regard to the motivation matter.

GTOC Impacts and Research Directions Since
The volume itself, and further defenses of it 1 have been cited OVER 1,200 times. This book has had and continues to have a huge impact. Into the 2000s it continued to be cited around 100 times a year. One of the largest areas of interest in this work has been developing empirical indicators of the tendency toward criminality, more specifically, low self control (LSC). Sociologists have generated multi-item indicators of LSC. 2 Researchers, as is their wont, have gotten into quibbling about how many dimensions within LSC there are, and how stable is it really over time, and other issues as well. Currently it looks like both an attitudinal and a behavioral component of LSC should be included. In addition to getting at LSC or capability for control a newer addition has been the desire to exercise control. 3 It looks like both of these influence reported deviance. It is no surprise that Chuck Tittle, whose important control balance theory is also widely influential, and which addresses desire for control, has called for this modification. 4 He argues that desire for control is as important as low self control. Researchers also have considered if LSC is something more than being religious. It looks like it is. 5

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Beware This Misconception
One of the widely mis-understood points about the GTOC is that it is not about one main effect.

It is not just
LSC ==> criminal behavior or behaviors involving force or fraud.
Rather it is:
Those with low self control when confronted with opportunities for force or fraud will take advantage:

LSC X Opportunity ==> criminal behavior or behaviors involving force or fraud

One early empirical work lead authored by Grasmick, a well known sociologist, validated this interactionist model. The interaction term was significant, but so too was the LSC main effect for one outcome. Regrettably, some later work has tended to forget the opportunity side of the model, and just focused on the connection between LSC and crime or deviant behavior. See, for example, a meta-analysis review by Pratt and Cullen. Look at their Table 1. They report that eight times more studies have looked at main effects of LSC than have looked at the [LSC X opportunity] interaction. Note also, however, that the effects look stronger for the interaction than for the main effects according to some measures.

In a recent work, Mike Gottfredson has started using the terms “propensity” and “exposures” and has recast the GTOC as a propensity-event model. Consider this quote:

General propensity-event theories, such as self-control theory, are also comfortable with the idea of human agency (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1990). Low self-control does not require crime any more than high self-control prohibits it. The general tendency to engage in or refrain from acts of short-term self-interest can be overcome by minimal barriers, by opportunities, and by decisions. Excellent work on offender decision making and experimental research on the effects of sanctions and incentives indicate the important role of decision making in offending.

What Gottfredson seems to be tending to do is to de-emphasize the ballistic importance of LSC, and highlight the roles of opportunities and decision making.

Does this sound a lot to you like SAT?

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In short, to some extent GTOC has become a moving target. It is easy to think too simplistically about this theory.

**Interactions vs. Main Effects**
As a general theory point, you might want to think about how is a “main effects” theory of criminal behavior different from a “person X situation” interactionist model. We already have talked about this with reference to Wikstrom’s SAT model. So too, at heart, GTOC is an interactionist (person X environment) model even though the research has not reflected that. What different challenges do these present for researchers, both in terms of operationalization, and in terms of validation?

**The Challenge for Measuring Opportunity**
As you read GTOC, think about: how do we reliably measure opportunity? Can we get past paper and pencil indicators? How does it depend on the context? There are a lot of measurement and operationalization concerns here needing attention.

**A Quick Aside on WCC**
Work has been done extending the model to white collar crime and white collar criminals, as G&H argued was appropriate. ⁹

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