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# CONTROLLING JUVENILE BEHAVIOR: An Empirical Test of Hirschi's Attachment and Involvement

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CONTROLLING JUVENILE BEHAVIOR:  
An Empirical Test of Hirschi's Attachment and Involvement

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

The current study is focused on the influence of Hirschi's Social Control Theory on juvenile delinquency. Specifically, I examined if attachment and involvement reduced delinquency among youth using a secondary data analysis of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). The results indicated that attachment to parental and/or non-parental adults does significantly affect delinquency, but voluntary involvement in conventional activities does not.



## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

A juvenile delinquent is defined as a person under the age of eighteen “who has committed an offense that, if committed by an adult, would constitute a criminal offense; or whom has been placed on probation as a delinquent youth or a youth in need of intervention and who has violated any condition of probation” (Burfeind & Bartusch, 2011, p.51). This phenomenon has become one of the most prominent challenges of American society today. Delinquency affects not only the offending juveniles but also society as a whole.

Juveniles who commit crimes regularly and are caught doing so will suffer in their futures. There are two types of juvenile offenders: juveniles who will be convicted only once in their lives and juveniles who will be convicted multiple times (McLaren, 2000). According to Carlos Carcach (1999), a senior research analyst at the Australian Institute of Criminology, “the overwhelming majority of young people have no contact with the criminal justice system and of those who have contact in the form of a court appearance, the majority has only the one appearance”(p.2). This means that a small minority of juveniles who are repeat offenders commit the bulk of juvenile delinquent acts.

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theories Explaining Delinquency

One theory that attempts to describe how a juvenile's entire life would be negatively impacted by delinquency is Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory. This theory proposes that individuals, specifically juveniles, learn the values, attitudes, techniques and motives for criminal behavior through interaction with other criminals (O'Connor, 2006). Meaning, a juvenile learns how to achieve goals through means of criminal behavior rather than through conventional law abiding means.

Sutherland's proposed learning process can happen in or outside of correctional units but is more likely to occur inside the units. An example of how this could occur is a first time offender gets convicted and must serve time in a juvenile hall where he will be surrounded by other juvenile delinquents. He will communicate with these peers and learn how and why they committed the crimes that got them locked up. Inadvertently he will learn what motivated those criminal actions and will associate their criminal actions with his own goals. If the young offender thinks that these new deviant methods are a better route than the conventional methods he has learned previously, then he will be more deviant coming out, than he was going into corrections.

Sutherland's (1947) theory suggests a spiraling down model of juvenile offender's lives. The more deviant they are, the more interactions they have with other deviant individuals who they learn from to become more deviant. The juveniles stuck in this spiral either do not want to be conventional or do not know how to and this blocks them from ever returning to the law

abiding part of society. Like the labeling theory the differential association theory leaves young offenders in a life full of crime or a life spent imprisoned.

Juvenile delinquency affects more than just the offender; it affects society as a whole. Juvenile delinquency has a correlation to high crime rates in neighborhoods (Chun & Steinburg, 2006). A study on community structure and crime found that communities with delinquent youth and low or no criminal preventative programs had disproportionately high rates of crime (Sampson & Groves, 1989). In other words, juvenile delinquency unattended to leads to vice in the neighborhood, which threatens the safety of its inhabitants.

It is a common theme among theorists that with crime comes drug use and there are many studies that indicate that criminals are often under the influence while committing crimes or were using just before the commission of their crime (Menard et al., 2001). Goode (2008) found that drug use appears to be even more significantly correlated with crime, especially for frequent heavy users. This correlation does not prove causation. In fact, it may be that the drug use causes the deviant behavior or there could be an unidentified factor that causes both. Regardless, this association between drug use and crime rates is detrimental to neighborhoods because the presence of one almost guarantees the other. Susan Richardson (2012), found that “4 out of 5 young people in the juvenile justice system have committed crimes while under the influence of drugs or alcohol”(Para. 2). Juvenile delinquency is a major problem to the neighborhoods that house these delinquent youths because they harbor drugs and commit crimes that disrupt the conventional inhabitants.

Another problem commonly associated with juvenile delinquency is the formation of gangs. Most know of the saying “birds of a feather flock together” and according to Sutherland (1947), when a bunch of bad “birds” flock together there is trouble in the neighborhood. One



delinquent youth on his or her own is problematic enough but when a group of them get together they can really cause havoc. Even worse is when multiple gangs are formed and they begin to have turf wars in order to claim their own sections of a neighborhood. Needless to say this can make life in a neighborhood with gangs very dangerous.

An unnerving finding by Klein and Maxson (2006), is that gang-affiliated youth commit more crimes, especially violent, drug and weapon related offenses, and are more delinquent than youth who have never been involved with gangs. This means that if a neighborhood has a few individual delinquent youth and they decide to form a gang together they will feed off each other's delinquent behaviors and each will become more delinquent than before. More violent and drug activity within a neighborhood lowers the safety of its inhabitants.

Besides the loss of safety, society also suffers monetarily. Large amounts of federal money are being spent yearly on employing law enforcement and juvenile justice system employees in the United States (Mendel, 2011). So while a person may not be a direct victim of a crime committed by a delinquent youth, they are still affected by his or her unlawful behaviors. If juvenile delinquency was not such a prevalent problem the money it takes could either stay in the taxpayers' pockets or be used on other federal projects.

Not only is money being spent to try and keep the juvenile delinquents in society at bay but it is also being used to incarcerate them. In Tennessee, "the average cost to house an inmate in 2012 was \$67.21 a day and to house a death row inmate it was \$96.75" (Department of Correction, n.d.). These averages are for adult prisons, but if juvenile delinquents are left unmanaged they are likely to become adult offenders who end up in prison and cost the nation a lot of money.

## **Social Control Theory**

There are many theories used to explain juvenile delinquency and they are often used to try and prevent it from occurring. Of all the theories used the most widely accepted theory is the Social Control Theory proposed by Travis Hirschi (1969). This theory “assumes that delinquent acts result when an individual’s bond to society is weak or broken”(Hirschi, 1969, p.16). There are four elements to the bond: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief.

According to Hirschi (1969), “humans are animals and thus naturally capable of committing criminal acts” (p.31). However, because humans are also social beings they are sensitive to the opinions of others. If a person is to be social and be accepted in society then he must not deviate from the norms of his society. Therefore, a person will become deviant if he is not attached to others and does not internalize the norms that society shares (Hirschi, 1969). This can be used to explain juvenile delinquency. If a youth has no one that he is particularly attached to and he does not care about the opinions of anyone important in his life then he is free to act upon his animalistic drives and become deviant.

Another element to Hirschi’s (1969) theory is commitment. This premise of the theory was created around the belief that some people do not commit crimes because they are afraid of the consequences they may face if they do so. “The idea, then is that the person invests time, energy, himself, in a certain line of activity”(Hirschi, 1969 p.20). The line of activity the person invests in must be conventional such as: going to school, having a job, building networks or creating a family. If a person has these stakes in conformity he will first have to contemplate the costs of acting deviantly and “consider the risk he runs of losing the investment he has made in the conventional behavior”(Hirschi, 1969, p.20). This premise can be used to explain why so many highly committed youth, who have conventional investments, are not deviant.

The third component of Social Control Theory is involvement. Involvement is the simplest element of Hirschi's (1969) theory. It refers to the fact that a person only has so much time in the day or in their life to do activities. Each activity takes up a certain amount of a person's limited time and with the election to do one activity, a person is given less of an opportunity to do something else. The thought behind this premise is that, a person may be simply too busy involving themselves in conventional things to find the time to engage in deviant behavior (Hirschi, 1969). This idea can be used to explain juvenile delinquency especially because adolescents are more likely to have leisure time, time not spent at work, school or on productive activities. This gives them free time and energy to be spent on deviant activities instead.

The last part of the Social Control Theory is belief. For the sake of this theory it is assumed that there is a common value system that an individual belongs to and when a person acts delinquently they are violating those values. If a person truly believes in and accepts the rules and values of the system they belong to then they will not be motivated to commit a crime or violate those rules (Hirschi, 1969). Socialization with other individuals ensures that everyone knows their culture's set of values. However, the thought process that allows an individual to become deviant, even though they recognize the rules, is that they are not bound to these rules. A deviant can either not identify with their beliefs and consider them just words or he can neutralize his beliefs by justifying his deviant act before he commits it (Hirschi, 1969). Both allow the deviant to maintain his conventional belief system and act deviantly at the same time. This can be used to account for juvenile delinquency if a juvenile accepts the values and beliefs of conventional society externally but internally does not consider them important or validates his decision to act unconventionally.

## **Testing the Social Control Theory**

The review that follows is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather focuses on those specific aspects of previous research that are directly related to the current study. Although there are four main components to the social control theory, the current study is only concerned with attachment and involvement bonds of Social Control Theory. Consequently, studies relating to or involving attachment and involvement bonds of Social Control Theory will be the only research reviewed. Other social control studies, such as research based on commitment or belief will not be reviewed due to the lack of connection to this study.

### ***Attachments***

There has been much research that supports Hirshi's (1969) claim of how positive attachments deter juvenile delinquency. However, most research on peer attachment has found that the level of a juvenile's delinquency is usually increased with close peer attachments (Demant and Houtte, 2012). According to Bendixen and colleagues (2006) friends often share a comparable level of deviancy and they tend influence each other to commit more delinquent acts. Demant and Houtte (2012) point out some flaws in Hirschi's (1969) control theory; the attachments that prevent delinquency must be positive and encourage conventionalism.

Other than the contrasting empirical evidence of peer attachments Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory has been supported finding the theory to be a helpful tool in understanding juvenile delinquency. Positive parental attachment has been repeatedly found to deter juvenile delinquency. Chan and associates (2013) found that parents have a strong protective factor of underage drinking when they have an emotionally close relationship with their child and disapprove of adolescent alcohol use. Flexon, Greenleaf and Lurigio (2012) found that weak parental attachment was a predicting factor of low self-control and claim that low self-control is

a contributing factor of juvenile delinquency. They go on to say that positive parental attachment was a mediating factor in the prediction of police contact (Flexon et al., 2012). Hirshi (1969) states, “if the child does not care or think about the reaction of his parents, their control over him is seriously reduced”(p. 108). This statement is empirically supported by the findings of Mark Warr (2007), who found that children whom are not properly attached to their parents are more apt to lie to their parents and lying is a strong correlate of delinquent behavior. Warr (2007) further states that adequate positive attachment to parents allows a child to voluntary self-disclose information to the parents and if a child lies that is quite the opposite. A study done by Alvarez-Rivera and Fox (2010), found that efforts focused on building the parent/child bond are helpful in preventing juvenile delinquency. For example, family therapy has been shown to improve the child’s bond and prevent future delinquency (Tremblay et al., 1995). The preventative effect of a strong parental attachment by a child is thus well established in research.

Another bond that has been shown to effect delinquency is the attachment or lack thereof to school. Hirshi (1969) defines attachment as a bond of affection, so for a child to have attachment to school he must enjoy or like some aspect of school. For instance in a study by Thaxton and Agnew (2004), children who have neutral or negative feelings towards their teacher are more likely to be deviant than children who have feel positively about their teacher. Pauwels and Svensson (2010) found supporting evidence stating, “weak school bonds are related to higher levels of propensity to offend independent of gender, immigrant background and family structure”(p.24). Chan and colleagues (2013) reported that a weak bond with the school predicted an escalation of alcohol use among children whom were transitioning into high school. A longitudinal study by Dornbusch and associates (2001) showed that regardless of gender or ethnicity school attachment reduces the chance of origination and overall frequency of deviant

behavior. In a study on teacher and school attachment Demanet and Houtte (2012) found that “higher school belonging and perceived teacher support are related to less school misconduct”(p.510). As a result of multiple researchers finding supportive evidence, the detrimental effect of a weak school attachment on a juvenile’s conventionality is widely accepted.

### ***Involvement***

There are three main subjects of involvement that have been abundantly researched in the past, namely church, work, and community activity. Church involvement, in this study and the studies reviewed will essentially mean the rate at which one participates in church related activities. Work involvement studies research the impact of the type, intensity and duration of jobs on juveniles’ lifestyles( e.g., Apel, Paternoster, Bushway, & Brame). Community activities are any activity that does not fall under the previous two involvement topics. These topics have been studied to see their relationship between the involvement rates of each and the amount or type of juvenile delinquency. According to Social Bond Theory involvement in conventional activities like these should prevent a juvenile from offending. However, in more recent studies this is not always the case.

Past research on church involvement’s role of juvenile delinquency has been characterized by conflicting empirical results ( e.g. Johnson & Jang 2000, Middleton & Putney 1962, Elifson, Petersen & Hadaway 1983, Cochran & Akers 1989). Some research has led one to believe that religious involvement leads to less delinquency while others believe it leads to more. Most research suggests that religious involvement leads to a decrease in some types of delinquency. A study done by Elifson and colleagues (1983) confirms a negative correlation stating that: “religious young people are less likely to be delinquent”(p.524). Cochran and Akers

(1989) found evidence that also suggests religious attendance is inversely related to deviance.

Other research that supports these negative correlations only supports the relationship concerning certain types of delinquency. For example, Middleton and Putney (1962) reported that church attendance had a strong negative correlation with victimless crimes only. Consistently, a study done by Chochran and associates (1994) found religious involvement to be a strong deterrent of alcohol and tobacco use among juveniles but insignificant at deterring crimes such as theft and vandalism. The research of Goldscheider and Simpson (1967) unfailingly found that Jewish religious involvement led to lower rates of juvenile delinquency and to less serious offenses.

There is also research that claims the relationship is spurious or that there is no relationship between religious attendance and juvenile delinquency at all. Some argue that religious attendance is an antecedent of other more proximal social controls, which deter juvenile delinquency, such as peer or family influences (Elifson et al., 1983). However, Hirschi and Stark (1969) claim that juvenile delinquency is virtually unrelated to religious involvement. They found that no matter how often they attend religious events there is neither a consistent decrease nor increase in juvenile delinquency (Hirschi & Stark, 1969).

Another type of involvement that has been statistically evaluated to find its correlation to juvenile delinquency is employment. Much like the findings for church involvement, the study results are sporadic and often contradictory of one another when it comes to a juvenile's relationship to employment and delinquency. Apel and colleagues (2007) found that working a long number of hours while enrolled in school is beneficial for some at-risk youth. In a follow up study, by Apel and colleagues (2008), the findings not only supported their previous research but found an "inverse casual effect of work intensity on delinquency"(p.355). This research supports Hirschi's (1969) theory that involvement in conventional activities will deter delinquent acts.

Ploeger (1997) however, found quite the opposite. He found that employment increases underage drinking and the use of illicit drugs (Ploeger, 1997).

Additionally, some researchers have found that different types of work have different effects on juvenile delinquency. Apel and colleagues (2006), found, that informal work (i.e., jobs with instant gratification such as babysitting) might have more of a positive correlation with delinquency than formal work (i.e., paycheck jobs). Similarly, Staff and associates (2010) conducted a study researching how intensity of work vs. desired intensity affects delinquency. The study found “significantly higher rates of crime and substance abuse among non-employed youth who preferred intensive work”(Staff et al., 2010, p.1123). This implies that work effects on delinquency may be due to attitudes toward work.

The other types of involvement are curricular, extracurricular and leisure activities as well as community service. While some studies researching their effects on delinquency find positive correlations, most suggest that these types of community involvement deter juvenile delinquency. Wong (2005) studied restraining effects of conventional involvement and found that studying and doing homework is a direct deterrent of delinquency. Zill and associates (1995) conducted a similar study and found that students who spent no time in school-sponsored activities were 49% more likely than those who did participate in activities to have used drugs, 35% more likely to have smoked cigarettes and 27% more likely to have been arrested. More supportive evidence of school related involvement being a deterrent of juvenile delinquency was found in a study by Barnes and colleagues (2007). They suggest while average time spent on homework is only a small fraction of overall time it is associated with less delinquency.

Other community involvement activities such as extracurricular activities do not have such a uniform basis of supportive research. For example some research, such as a study done by



Burton and Marshall (2005) suggest that sports participants are more likely to be delinquent than nonparticipants. However, Gardner et al. (2009) propose that comparing the type of involvement too broadly causes this finding and others like it. In their study, they broke up the nonparticipants of sports into two groups, nonathletic participators and individuals who did not participate in any organized activities, and compared them to adolescents who participated in athletics. Their findings were, “the odds of nonviolent delinquency were higher among boys who participated in sports when compared to boys who only participated in nonathletic activities but not when compared to boys who did not participate in any organized activities”(p.350). This finding suggests that the grouping of the two types of nonathletic participants previously could have caused the positive correlation findings found. Another study by Kruttschnitt and associates (1986) supports a negative relationship concluding that club activities have a small effect on reducing violent criminal behaviors. Darling (2005) also found a protective factor with extracurricular activities, especially for higher risk adolescents. She also found a positive correlation between amount of time spent in these activities and the enhancement of the protective benefits.

While leisure has been dismissed by Hirschi (1969), more recent findings suggest that involvement in these activities is a protective factor. A study conducted by Roberts and associates (2011) found that participation in conforming activities in the home was significant for reducing delinquency. Yin and colleagues (1999) found similar support stating, “students who participated in organized leisure activities and activities at home were less involved in delinquency and had better school performance. Family leisure time was a strong predictor of juvenile delinquency in a study by Barnes and associates (2006); “family time is a protective factor against the development of problem behaviors”(p.707).

Finally participating in the community involvement activity community service has not been researched as in-depth as the previous activities. However, one study by Hoffman and Xu (2002) found that involvement in community service is associated with less delinquency. This finding was especially true of individuals who attended schools that they considered unsafe, implying that community service provides an equally beneficial alternative to school related activities.

### **Purpose**

According to previous research the strongest preventative factor of juvenile delinquency is a positive attachment bond, specifically to the parents. However, the fact that school attachment is a weak preventative of delinquency leads one to believe there could be other attachment bonds that could help reduce delinquency as well. Also, according to previous research on peer bonds one can draw the conclusion that a strong attachment to a youth's peers is less likely to reduce the risk of delinquency. Drawing from these two premises, I would like to study juvenile attachments to adults that are not their parents and see the bond's effects on the juvenile's propensity to offend. My first research question seeks to explore how bonds between juveniles and parental and/or nonparental conventional adults affect the juvenile's likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts.

My second research question is based on the sporadicity of previous research findings. Of the three types of involvement bonds that have been formerly researched, the first two have many studies that contradict one another. Some studies claim that involvement in church or religious activities reduce a juvenile's inclination to offend while others say it increases it. The third type of involvement bond, community activities has often been found to reduce the likelihood of a juvenile acting delinquently. I believe the difference between the first two types

and the last are a juvenile's attitude during the specific involvement types. In other words, it is not necessarily the activity the juvenile is involved with as much as it is his perceived experience of that activity. My second question explores the influence of a juvenile's participation in conventional activities that he or she may perceives as a positive experience on his or her delinquency.

## CHAPTER 3 -METHODS

### **Purpose**

Previous research using Social Control Theory as their theoretical perspective tried to find evidence that either supported, disproved or furthered Hirschi's (1969) theory. This research mostly focused on the four premises of attachment, commitment, involvement and belief and how they influence juvenile delinquency patterns. Of those four components, my main focus is on reviewing attachment and involvement. In the previous research reviewed, while there were multiple types of methodologies used, most took a quantitative stance on understanding the content. Like much of the previous research, I will be using a quantitative approach throughout my study. I plan on examining the effect of attachments to nonparental adults on juvenile delinquency. Additionally, I will examine the influence of strong parental attachments on juvenile delinquency. I will also explore how being involved with conventional activities influences rates of delinquency for juveniles as well. An important component of conventional activities for this study is the voluntariness of the youth to participate in these activities. Therefore a variety of activities are included, ranging from team sports (which may be less voluntary) to individual activities such as roller blading or jogging (that may be more voluntary). For my study, juvenile delinquency is the behavior of a person under the age of eighteen that involves committing an action that is marked by law to be illegal. This is including but not limited to the status offenses of minors such as, consumption of alcohol, use of tobacco, truancy and running away from home.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What effect does parental attachment have on juvenile delinquency?
- 2) What effect does non-parental attachment have on juvenile delinquency?
- 3) What effect does involvement in positive activities have on juvenile delinquency?

## **Data and Sample**

In order to conduct my research I employed a secondary data analysis. The data used for this study comes from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) conducted from 1994-2008 by Kathleen Harris and Richard Udry. The longitudinal study has data on respondents' social, economic, psychological and physical well-being with contextual data on the family, neighborhood, community, school, friendships, peer groups, and romantic relationships. The data combined allows for a study of how social environments and behaviors in adolescents are linked to health and achievement outcomes in young adulthood. In my study, I only used the first of four waves with a sample size of 6,485. I used the data that focuses on attachment and involvement bonds and compare them to the data on delinquency. The data is available in both public and limited access formats. The public access data is free for downloading from two sources, but is limited in the variables that can be retrieved<sup>1</sup>.

## **Measures**

### *Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable, participation in juvenile delinquency was measured by computing a scale, which added together 15 dichotomous (yes/no) measures of delinquency. The measures were: made Graffiti, damaged property, lied to parents, shoplifted, got in a fight, seriously injured someone, ran away from home, stole a car, stole something worth more than \$50, stole something worth more than \$50, burglarized a building, threatened someone with a weapon, sold drugs, participated in a group fight and have been in a loud/rowdy place. Thus, a

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed instructions for retrieving the Add Health public data can be found at <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth/data>.

juvenile could score from 0-15 on the delinquency scale. The range for my sample was 0-15 with a mean of 4.78.

### *Independent and Control Variables*

My independent variables were the attachment to a nonparental adult and/or a parent, and the involvement in hobbies and activities. For this study, attachment will be measured by three variables: the influence of the juvenile's mother, the influence by the juvenile's father and the influence of other positive relationships. Each of the measures were computed by the researcher.

For the influence of the juvenile's mother, the following dichotomous items were summed together: your mother is warm and loving toward you, your mother encourages you to be independent, when you do something wrong, your mother talks about it with you and helps you understand why it is wrong, you are satisfied with the way your mother and you communicate with each other and overall, you are satisfied with your relationship with your mother. The influence of the juvenile's mother ranged from 0-5 factors with an average of 4.78 factors.

For the influence of the juvenile's father, the following dichotomous items were summed together: your father is warm and loving toward you, you are satisfied with the way your father and you communicate with each other and overall, you are satisfied with your relationship with your father. The influence of the juvenile's father ranged from 0-3 factors with an average of 2.77 factors.

For the influence of a non-parental adult on the juvenile, the following dichotomous items were summed together: you feel that adults care about you, you feel that your teachers care about you, you feel that your parents care about you, you feel that your friends care about you, you feel that people in your family understand you, you feel that you do not want to leave home,

you feel that you and your family have fun together and you feel that your family pays attention to you. The influence of a non-parental adult on the juvenile ranged from 1.5-5 factors with an average of 4.01 factors.

For the influence of hobbies and positive activities on the juvenile, the following dichotomous items were summed: engaging in outdoor activities like rollerblading, playing team sports, having a hobby and engaging in exercises such as jogging.

My control variables are: gender, race, ethnicity and age. As shown in Table 1, sample included 6485 juveniles. Of the respondents 48.4% were male and 51.6% female. The race distribution was predominantly white 64.9% while only 23.7% were black and 11.4% fell into the other category. Ethnicity was broken down by Hispanic and non-Hispanic origins, which was 11.3% and 88.4% respectively. Age ranged from 12-21 years with an average of 16.04 years old.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Statistics	Description
Juvenile delinquency	Mean=2.74 Range=0-15	15 item scale measuring delinquency
Parental Attachment	Mom Mean=4.78 Range=0-5	5 item scale measuring mother influence
	Dad Mean=2.77 Range=0-3	3 item scale measuring father influence
Non-Parental Attachment	Mean=4.01 Range=1.5-5.0	5 item scale measuring non-parental influence
Positive Acts	Mean=2.69 Range=0-4	4 item scale measuring protective factors
Gender	Male=48.4% Female=51.6%	0 = male; 1=female
Race	White=64.9% Black=23.7% Other=11.4%	0 = white; 1 = black; 2 = other
Ethnicity	Hispanic Origin=11.3% Non-Hispanic Origin=88.4%	0 = non-Hispanic; 1 = Hispanic
Age	Mean=16.04 Range=12-21	Age in years

## **Analytic Plan**

In order to study the effects of attachment and involvement on juvenile delinquency, several analyses were conducted. First and foremost, descriptive statistics for all of the dependent, independent, and control variables were examined. Next, I examined the effects of parental attachment on juvenile delinquency through linear regression, because the dependent variable, juvenile delinquency is a ratio level measure (Montgomery, Peck & Vining, 2012). The effects of non-parental attachment and involvement in positive activities on delinquency were also measured through linear regression, separately.



## CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

### Research Question 1: What effect does parental attachment have on delinquency?

In order to examine the effects of parental attachment on juvenile delinquency, linear regression was used. The first model testing parental attachment included the dependent measure, juvenile delinquency, along with the independent variable, parental attachment to mother and the following control variables: gender, race, ethnicity and age. The model overall was significant. Attachment to the mother had a significant and negative effect on juvenile delinquency ( $B=-.506$ ,  $SE=.052$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Race ( $B=.254$ ,  $SE=.055$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and gender ( $B=.971$ ,  $SE=.076$ ,  $p<.001$ ) also significantly affected delinquency as shown in Table 2. The second model testing parental attachment included the dependent measure, juvenile delinquency, along with the independent variable parental attachment to the father and the following control variables: gender, race, ethnicity and age. This model was also significant. Attachment to the father significantly and negatively influenced juvenile delinquency ( $B=-.572$ ,  $SE=.060$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Gender ( $B=.894$ ,  $SE=.084$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and race ( $B=.284$ ,  $SE=.063$ ,  $p<.001$ ) also significantly affected delinquency as shown in Table 3.

**Table 2: Regression of Mother's Influence on Delinquency**

Variable	B	SE
Mom Influence	-.506***	.052
Gender	.971***	.076
Race	.254***	.055
Ethnicity	-.006	.008
Age	-.003	.021
R Square	.058***	

**Table 3: Regression of Father's Influence on Delinquency**

Variable	B	SE
Dad Influence	-.572***	.060
Gender	.894***	.084
Race	.284***	.063
Ethnicity	-.005	.007
Age	.014	.024
R Square=.059***		

**Research Question 2: What effect does non-parental attachment have on juvenile delinquency?**

In order to examine the effects of non-parental attachment on juvenile delinquency, linear regression was used. This model included the dependent measure, juvenile delinquency, along with the independent variable, non-parental attachment and the following controls: gender, race, ethnicity and age. The model overall was significant. Attachment to a non-parental adult proved to have a negative affect on juvenile delinquency( B=-1.584, SE=.056, p<.001). Gender (B=.838, SE=.,065, p<.001) and race ( B=..157, SE=..047, p<.001) also significantly affected delinquency as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Regression of Non-Parental Adults' Influence on Delinquency**

Variable	B	SE
Non-Parental Influence	-1.584***	.056
Gender	.838***	.065
Race	.157***	.047
Ethnicity	-.007	.006
Age	-.109***	.019
R Square=.139***		

**Research Question 3: What effect does involvement in positive activities have on juvenile delinquency?**

In order to examine the effects of the involvement in positive activities on juvenile delinquency, linear regression was used. This model included the dependent measure, juvenile delinquency, along with the independent variable, positive activity involvement and the following controls: gender, race, ethnicity and age. While the overall model was significant, involvement in positive activities did not significantly affect juvenile delinquency(  $B=-.022$ ,  $SE=.036$ ,  $p>.5$ ). Indeed, none of the variables in this model were significant, as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Regression of Positive Acts Influence on Delinquency**

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Variable	B	SE
Positive Act's Influence	-.022	.036
Gender	.867	.068
Race	.190	.049
Ethnicity	-.009	.007
Age	-.018	.020

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R Square=.027\*\*\*

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## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to further analyze how attachment and involvement influence juvenile delinquency. For my first hypothesis, I used a quantitative approach to examine the effect of attachment to strong parental as well as non-parental adults on juvenile delinquency. There has been limited previous research on non-parental attachment's influence on delinquency but ample of research on parental attachment. In almost all of the previous research, positive parental attachment has been repeatedly found to deter juvenile delinquency (e.g., Alvarez-Rivera and Fox, 2010, Chan et al., 2013, Flexon et al., 2012, Greenleaf and Lurigio, 2012, Hirschi, 1969, Tremblay et al., 1995 & Warr, 2007).

In my study, I found statistically significant results that agree with their research. As the influential factors of the mother and/or the father go up juvenile delinquency goes down. Thus, parental attachment did reduce juvenile delinquency, a finding that supports the Social Control Theory. These results reinforce the need for current and future prevention and rehabilitation programs to focus on building and nurturing strong relationships between parents and at risk juveniles. Notably, I also found statistically significant results for attachment to non-parental adults. As influential factors of non-parental adults go up juvenile delinquency goes down. Therefore, it would seem that positive relationships with adult figures, regardless of their relation to the juvenile, tends to decrease the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. These results are imperative because the outlook for juveniles whom are unable to have a strong bond with their parents is still optimistic. Programs for these juveniles should focus on building relationships with model mentors that can offer the same advice and guidance, which a juvenile needs, to keep from being delinquent.

For my second hypothesis, testing the effects of voluntary involvement in conventional activities on juvenile delinquency, I also used a quantitative approach. The previous research has mixed results. Some studies found that the involvement in conventional activities raised the rate of delinquency for participating juveniles (e.g., Apel et al., 2006, Burton & Marshall, 2005 & Gardner et al., 2009, Ploeger, 1997). Most other researchers found just the opposite, that participation in conventional activities lowered the risk of juvenile delinquency (e.g., Apel et al., 2007 & 2009, Barnes et al., 2007, Cochran & Akers, 1989, Chochran et al., 1994, Darling, 2005, Elifson et al., 1983, Goldscheider & Simpson, 1967, Hirschi's, 1969, Hoffman and Xu, 2002, Middleton & Putney, 1962, Roberts et al., 2011, Wong, 2005 & Yin et al., 1999). My findings were inconclusive, however, due to the fact that they were not statistically significant. Thus, my findings indicate that involvement in conventional activities has no effect on delinquency. Ultimately my finding, however, falls in line with the previous research that cannot agree with what kind of role involvement in conventional activities play on juvenile delinquency.

Overall, I found results that can be used to further understanding of juvenile delinquency. A strong attachment to a non-parental adult negatively affected involvement in juvenile delinquency even more strongly than the parental attachment. This can be substantial information for individuals looking to help at risk juveniles. Involvement however, needs more refined research so that conclusive statistically evidence may be found stating the effects it has on juvenile delinquency.

### ***Limitations***

Despite the size of the sample and strength of methods employed, the current study is not without limitations. The data used was collected in 1994, which makes the data about 20 years old. This may mean that the data is out of date due to the constant changing nature of society's

believes and behaviors. Another restriction caused by the use of secondary data is that the data set chosen was not specifically created to test my hypotheses. Even though the items chosen were relative to testing my hypotheses they are not as specific as could have been. This makes my conclusions less valid and in order to be surer of my finding further original research should be done.

### ***Future Research***

According to my research there is a possibility that attachment to a non-parental adult can deter delinquency. To better understand this finding original research should be done to further analyze the connection between attachment to non-parental adults and delinquency. As for my findings about involvement in conventional activities and how it is unrelated to juvenile delinquency, I believe future research also needs to be done. There needs to be original work done to further analyze why there are diversely mixed results in many studies as to whether or not involvement can be used as a predictor to juvenile delinquency. Future research should focus on finding if or what spurious factor is causing the mixed results in studies researching involvement and juvenile delinquency. With a better understanding as to what deters juvenile delinquency, we as a society may move in a direction better suited to prevent and or even eliminate juvenile delinquency.

### **Conclusion**

My research testing the influence of Hirschi's Social Control Theory on juveniles found encouraging results. I found positive effects of attachment bonds formed between juveniles and parental and/or non-parental adults. Understanding these effects allows for better policies and programs to be made that would more efficiently help at risk youth. Applying these findings to the future could lead to the prevention of many cases of juvenile delinquency. While my findings

about the effects of involvement on juvenile delinquency were inclusive, they also helped narrow down what the possible connection could be between the two. My study further emphasizes the need for researchers to uncover the relationship between the bond of involvement and adolescents. Understanding this relationship would be very beneficial when trying to create programs that would prevent or put an end to juvenile delinquency.

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