

Social Bonds, Self-Control and Deviance of Korean Adolescents

Byung Jun Cho

Westfield State University
Criminal Justice Department
Westfield State University
333 Western Avenue
Westfield
Massachusetts
U.S

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship among social bonds, self-control, and deviance. A self-report instrument containing two formations of control and deviance was administered to a sample of 368 Korean high school students. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was used to test the magnitude of the independent effects of social bonds and self-control on deviance. Path analysis was used to examine the relationship among social bonds, self-control, and deviance. Results showed that self-control and social bonds can be considered as two important aspects of the self-regulatory mechanism which influences the individual's decision to offend or not to offend when presented with the opportunity. The path model, furthermore, suggested that social bonds can be seen as an intervening or mediating variable between self-control and juvenile offending.

Keywords: Social Bonds, Self-Control, and Deviance of Korean Adolescents

1. Introduction

Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) self-control and Hirschi's social bonds (1969) and have been the most frequently tested and empirically supported broad-based explanation of crime and deviance (Marcus, 2004; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Taylor, 2001). While the impact of these two prominent control perspectives is considerable in criminology, it is less clear that how these two formations of control might be reconciled (Longshore, Chang, & Messina, 2005; Taylor, 2001). Although the sources of self-control and social bonds are quite different, both theories integrate the classical view on the pleasure-seeking, pain-averse, rational nature of humans to postulate inhibitory factors (i.e., self-control and social bonds) as the central variables associated with crime and deviance. Given that criminal behaviors provide immediate gratification at the risk of long-term pains, individuals with less inhibitory factors are more likely to commit deviant acts to secure short term benefits than their more restrained counterparts who take a broader view of the consequences of criminal and/or deviant behavior. Furthermore, control theories assume that all individuals in society have the propensity to commit deviant acts because human nature is hedonistic regardless of the sources of control. This assumption makes control theories different from other theoretical perspectives, which suggests a possibility of combining them into a single control model. As commented by Longshore et al. (2005), a theoretical reconciliation between self-control and social bonds can contribute to the body of the literature by explaining more variation in deviance and crime without falsifying any one theory individually.

2. Background

Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime (1990), also known as self-control theory is one of the most parsimonious theories in the field of criminology (Akers, 2000). In general theory of crime, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) proposed that appropriate child rearing practices would result in increasing the probability that a child will develop the appropriate level of self-control necessary to resist the temptation of crime. This internal personality-based inhibitory factor, known as self-control influences the individual's decision to offend or not to offend when presented with the opportunity. In Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) perspective, individuals who possess low self-control are generalists who have a high chance of engaging in a wide range of criminal acts, as opposed to a specialist who limits themselves to a narrow scope of criminal acts and has a strong preference to commit a specific act.

These low self-control individuals ignore or discount the long-term consequences of deviant behavior for immediate benefits. The kinds of people who make these poor choices or lack self-control are characterized as impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, shortsighted, and nonverbal. Several studies have confirmed that self-control is a trait-based personality theory, which focuses on the central explanatory factor (self-control) that influences the individual's decision to offend or not to offend when presented with the opportunity. (Benda, 2005; Chapple, 2005; Delisi et al., 2003; Ribeaud & Eisner, 2006; Gibson, Schreck, & Miller, 2004; Higgins, Ricketts, & Vegh, 2008; Holtfreter, Beaver, Reisig, & Pratt, 2010; Morselli & Tremblay, 2004; Vazsonyi & Crosswhite, 2004; Winfree, Taylor, He, & Esbensen, 2006). Self-control theory, however, is different from a genetic-based biological theory as the levels of self-control are expected to be established at the age of 6 or 7 as a result of child rearing practices (Unnever, Cullen, & Pratt, 2003).

Contrast to the general theory of crime, Hirschi's (1969) social bonds theory views deviance as an outcome of lacking four external factors (i.e. attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief). These four bonding elements work as a set of external restraining forces that when weak or absent allow the natural human tendency toward deviance to come into play. In Hirschi's social bonding theory (1969), attachment refers to the degree of emotional ties to significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, and institutions). Commitment represents investment in conventional activities and expectations. For example, an individual who is committed to a particular career is likely to be controlled or restrained by his or her stake or investment (what he or she is and/or what he or she wishes to be). Belief reflects the extent that an individual embraces values, rules, and norms of the society. The connection between social bonds and crime and deviance is the most frequently tested proposition derived from Hirschi's social bonds theory. This proposition has received empirical support when tested on samples featuring a range of demographic characteristics (Estevez & Emler, 2010; Fukushima, Sharp, & Kobayashi, 2009; Özbay & Özcan, 2006; Tripodi, 2010). However, contrary to Hirschi's (1969) claim that the four elements of social bonds are equally important, some studies show variability in explaining deviance. While the influence of belief or attachment is greatly supported, involvement in conventional activities has not received much support (Fukushima et al., 2009; Özbay & Özcan, 2006). It is rather argued that more involvement in conventional activities actually produces more delinquency (Vold, Bernard, & Snipes, 2002). This finding makes involvement an especially problematic element. One way to interpret the unexpected result regarding the element of involvement is that it is possible that a participation in some activities may present more criminal opportunities.

Does self-control affect development of social bonds later? It is an important issue to specify how self-control and social bonds interact with one another. Akers (2000) raises a concern that the conceptual link between social bonds and self-control should be clarified. A similar point has been made by Longshore and his colleagues (2005), asserting that how these two perspectives (social bonds and self-control) interact was not yet specified. In addition, Taylor (2001) asserts that a clear conceptualization, which specifies the relationship between self-control (internal control) and social bonds (external control), has not been made in criminology. Taylor (2001) further discusses the conceptual linkages between social bonds and self-control and delineated three key similarities between the two kinds of control. Both control perspectives value attachment to the significant others (i.e., family members), underemphasize social structural factors, and reject theoretical integration. However, Taylor (2001) argues that two formations of control are conflicting due to the differences in their theoretical propositions despite three similarities. For instance, social bonds theory proposes that development of the four elements of social bond are not limited to early childhood while self-control theory adopts the age invariance proposition that development of self-control is set up in the early age and will be relatively stable throughout the life course of an individual. However, Taylor (2001) thinks that self-control and social bonds are not inherently incompatible. This implies a possible integration of two theories in which the relationship between low self-control and deviance is mediated by social bonds.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) also take a similar position that with regard to the relationship between self-control and social bonds even though they favor self-control over social bonds. However, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), indeed, open up a possibility of combining self-control and social bonds into a single theoretical model as they postulate that deviance and weak social bonds are the products of low self-control. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) further state that self-control is a major factor in determining quality of social relationships.

Consequently, a logical relationship between these two conceptualizations is that self-control taps into internal control while the elements of social bond tap into external control, both of which have a significant impact on the outcome of the decision making process. This is a similar approach that a few studies have taken to test social bonds and self-control theories at the same time (Evans, Cullen, Burton, Dunaway, & Benson, 1997; Longshore et al., 2005; Wright, Caspi, Moffit, & Silva, 1999). Longshore and his colleagues (2005) tested three elements of social bond (belief, attachment, and commitment) and deviant peer associations as results of low self-control by using a sample of 359 adolescent offenders. They found that the juvenile offending and self-control link was fully mediated by the elements of social bonds, which implies that self-control and social bonds can be integrated into a single control perspective.

Wright and his colleagues (1999) also found that individuals with low self-control are less likely to formulate appropriate levels of social ties to conventional society, which implies for a possible integration between two theories. In particular, they tested three theoretical models; a model that links crime to social control, a model that links crime to self-control, and a model that links self-control and social bonds. They found that low self-control predicted disrupted social bonds and greater offending later in life. This implies social bonds mediate the effects of self-control on crime. In addition, Evans and his colleagues (1997) found that an individual with low self-control is less likely to form quality of relations with others as friends, employees, or spouses, which also shows that that self-control and social bonds can be integrated into a single path model in which social bonds and crime are the products of low self-control.

3. Current Study

The central purpose of this study is to explore the relationship among deviance, social bonds (Hirschi, 1969) and self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Since the connection between social bonds and self-control has been still in dispute, examining the relationship between two kinds of control is meaningful endeavor. The integrated control perspective on crime and deviance will significantly contribute to the body of the literature by reducing the number of theories in criminology. In particular, a model, depicting the effects of self-control on deviance are mediated by social bonds would be a good strategy for testing the effects of a combined control perspective on deviance. In addition, the combined perspective will make both theories more powerful in explaining variation in crime without falsifying either social bonds or self-control.

In this study, consistent with the predictions regarding the relationship between social bonds and self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Taylor, 2001) and the research findings (Evans et al., 1997; Longshore et al. 2005, Wright et al., 1999), it is hypothesized that social bonds mediate the association between self-control and deviance. In particular, it is believed that self-control can be viewed as a generalized personality trait (internal inhibitory) while social bonds can be seen as external restraining forces.

4. Methods

4.1 Sampling

An instrument containing measures of social bonds, self-control, deviance and demographic characteristics was administered to an availability sample of high school students in Korea. More specifically, an availability sample of 368 students at least 18 years old (mostly grade 12) was sampled from a sampling frame of approximately 3000 students in two liberal high schools in Seoul, Korea. Liberal high schools are the most common type of high school in Korea. Liberal high schools include public, private, science, and foreign language schools that are preparatory to university entry. Industrial high schools such as the technical, commercial, and informational schools are also available but were not included in this study. The two liberal high schools have been purposively sampled in Seoul, Korea. In selecting the sampling strategy and sample, two particular issues were considered. The first concern was how well the sample would fit some of the criteria of a good sample for surveys on crime and delinquency and for theory testing. Second, consideration was given to whether or not the sample would be suitable for eliciting accurate self-report responses. The most compelling argument for using a student sample is that the control theories are relative (Gibbs, Giever, & Higgins, 2003).

In particular, they state that despite the differences across groups (e.g., monks in a monastery or convicts in maximum-security prison), those who get relatively high scores in self-control are expected to have relatively low scores in deviance. Using a sample of students would not be a concern in testing theories. The accuracy or validity of the responses of participants, however, is always a concern in self-report surveys of crime and deviance.

A questionnaire survey, however, is better than face-to-face interviews because reports of most offenses are higher in questionnaire surveys and the correlation between risk factors and delinquency is more pronounced in paper and pencil surveys (Ribeaud & Eisner, 2006). In particular, high school student samples are very suitable for eliciting accurate self-report responses because these students are presumed to be literate and accustomed to completing survey instruments.

4.2 Measures of Deviance

The measures of deviance should reflect common core elements that appeal to Korean adolescents. The common characteristics of deviance include short-lived, immediately gratifying, easy, simple and exciting (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Most importantly, they proposed the versatility hypothesis that those who are in low-self control engage in a wide range of criminal behaviors. The most reliable way to develop the measures of deviance was adopting universal and cultural free items from the past studies that Korean youths can also find an opportunity to commit. In particular, Vazsonyi, Wittekind, Belliston, and Loh's (2004) 55-normative deviance scale is broad and universal enough to encompass a wide variety of deviance and crime across different culture and traditions. In particular, their measure of deviance is notable in terms of its reliability and the homogeneity of the instrument, which means that the deviance instrument developed by Vazsonyi and his colleagues (2004) is balanced and contained all the elements conceptualized in Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) theory.

Deviance was measured by the 22-normative deviance scale, which is a modified and culturally adjusted version of a self-report crime and deviance scale that was used in the past two studies that tested the cultural consistency of self-control theory (Vazsonyi, et al., 2004). Subjects in this study were asked to estimate their lifetime prevalence of committing acts such as personal crimes, property crimes, thefts, fraud, identity and privacy violations of computer and internet use, drugs, tobacco use, and alcohol consumption. The deviance scale is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Deviance Scale

Types	Items
Personal crimes	Not counting fights you may have had with a brother or sister when you were a child, how many times have you beaten up someone or tried to physically hurt someone on purpose? How many times have you used a weapon with the intention to threaten or hurt someone?
Property crimes	How many times have you damaged someone else's property on purpose?
Theft	Other than hunting or fishing, how many times have you intentionally injured an animal? How many times have you stolen cash, goods, or property worth less than \$50? How many times have you stolen cash, goods, or property more than \$50? How many times have you intentionally not paid for something, such as food in a restaurant or an admission fee for entertainment?
Fraud	How many times, not counting family, have you borrowed money from someone when you knew you would never repay them? How many times, not counting immediate family members, have you used someone else's credit card, debit card, or checkbook without permission? How many times have you written a bad check on purpose? How many times, not counting immediate family members, have you taken someone's car or other motor vehicle without their prior knowledge and permission?
Acts of Identity and Privacy Violations of Computer and Internet Use	How many times have you read someone else's emails, instant messages, or cell texts without their permission? How many times have you used the identity of another person or a made-up identity in e-mails, blogs, chat rooms, or elsewhere on the internet? How many times have you intentionally copied and sent to others copyright protected materials like computer software programs (not shareware), movies, and/or video games?
Drugs	How many times have you purposely gotten high using more than the recommended amount of prescription painkillers? (e.g., Tylenol with Codeine, Percocet, Vicodin, and/or OxyContin) How many times have you purposely gotten high by sniffing glue products and/or butane gas? How many times have you smoked marijuana? How many times have you used cocaine, crack, or methamphetamines (i.e., Philopon)? How many times have you used heroin? How many times have you used hallucinogens like LSD, mescaline, or ecstasy?
Tobacco and Alcohol	How often do you use tobacco (smoke, dip, or chew)? How many times have you consumed alcohol to the point that you don't remember some part of night?

The acts varied in seriousness. In fact, the internal consistency of .79 indicates that the crime and deviance items in this study have adequate variance in common to be considered a scale (DeVellis, 2003).

4.3 Measures of Social Bonds

Measures of social bonds should reflect Hirschi's (1969) perspective on control. He presented social bonds as a broader concept focuses on inhibitory factors affecting cognitive assessment of consequences. The factors are social bonds—attachment, involvement, commitment, and belief. Inhibitory factors recognized by the individual affect the range of consequences in making choice about criminal behavior. The process of developing the measures of social bonds started with selecting promising bond factors used in the previous studies (Estevez & Emler, 2010; Fukushima et al., 2009; Özbay & Özcan, 2006; Tripodi, 2010; Writght, Caspi, & Moffitt, 1999). In particular, this study adopted an observed item or a scale of the measures from the previous studies that showed an acceptable consistency or stability in testing the theory. For example, an item with having a value of the corrected item-total correlation at .3 or above, as well as a scale that a value of the Cronbach's alpha between .70 and .80 was considered as an appropriate item or scale of measures (Devellis, 2003). In Table 2, the social bond scale consists of a total of 16 items after reviewing items in the past studies. The self-control scale reached an acceptable level of internal consistency of .80.

Table 2: The Social Bond Scale

Measures	Items
Attachment	I value the opinion of my parents about most things
	My parents are pretty well informed about what is happening in my life
	My teachers consider me trustworthy
	The opinion of me held by teachers I respect matters a lot me
	It is very important to me to be respected by friends whose values I respect
Commitment	If I hurt my friend's feeling, it would bother me
	Graduating from school is a very high priority for me
	Doing well in school is important to most of my friends
	Most of my close friends are ready to party 24/7
Involvement	I consider school mostly a waste of my time
	How much time you spent on average day playing electronic games such as grand theft auto, sudden attack, and lineage?
	How much time you spent on the average day voluntarily reading literature, playing a musical instrument, and/or participating in the arts or sciences?
Belief	How much time you spent on the average day cruising around at night?
	There are a number of situation in which it is okay to lie
	If you have a chance to get around rules and regulations, you should take it
	I believe rules were made to be broken

4.4 Measures of Self-Control

An eight-item measure of self-control was also included in the questionnaire. Most of these items (or variations on them) have been found to be successful items in other studies (Gibbs et al., 2003; Higgins et al., 2008; Ribeaud & Eisner, 2006). Table 3 presents a total of eight items that are intended to measure self-control. The Cronbach's alpha of the self-control scale is .92, which represents excellent internal consistency (DeVellis, 2003).

Table 3: The Self-Control Scale

Measures	Items
Impulsivity	I do take pleasure where and when I can get it
	I usually think of future consequences before I act
Simple task	I tend to avoid difficult tasks
Temper	When I get mad, I sometimes yell or trash things rather than discuss it
	I can be pretty quick to anger
Risk taking	If you want to have fun, you have to be willing to do something dangerous
Self-centeredness	I try to look out for myself first even if it makes things difficult for others
Physical than verbal	I would get out to have fun than I would read and contemplate things

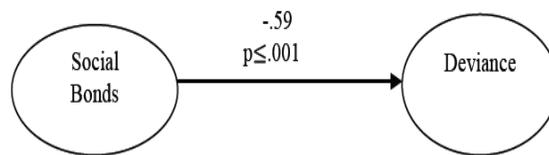
5. Findings

This study used bivariate and multiple ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to examine the influence of social bonds and self-control on deviance. As displayed in path diagrams A, B, and C in Figure 1 below, both social bonds and self-control have an influence on the extent self-reported involvement in deviant behavior.

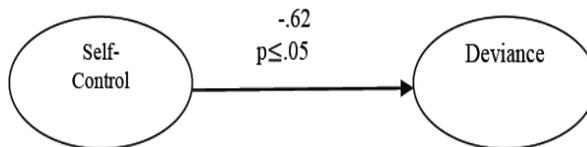
The beta weights or path coefficients shown in Figures 1.A and 2.B indicate that at the bivariate level the extent of involvement in self-reported deviant behavior is influenced by social bonds ($\beta = -.59$) and self-control ($\beta = -.62$). The beta weight for deviance and self-control is slightly greater than that for deviance and social bonds. Figure 1.C presents the independent effects of social bonds and self-control on deviance. Both kinds of control have a significant independent influence on level of participation in deviance. The partial beta weight or path coefficient measuring the influence of social bonds on deviance is a solid $-.42$. For self-control, the coefficient is a modest to weak $-.18$. A comparison of the bivariate path coefficients in Figures 1.A and 1.B with the partial path coefficient in Figure 1.C indicates the magnitude of the influence of both social bonds and self-control shrinks when both kinds of control are included in the model or treated as covariates. This also means that the multivariate model incorporating the introduction of self-control into the model does not make much of a contribution. The introduction of the measure of self-control into the model to make it multivariate might be specification error representing the inclusion of an irrelevant variable.

Figure 1: Deviance Regressed on Social Bonds and Self-Control

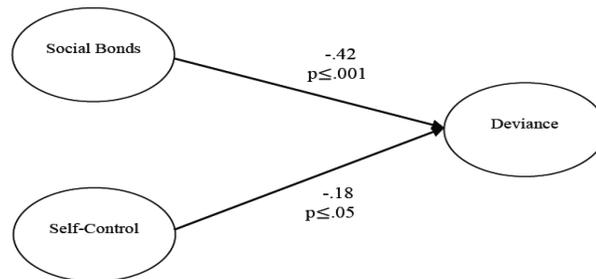
A. Bivariate Regression of Deviance on Social Bonds



B. Bivariate Regression of Deviance on Self-Control



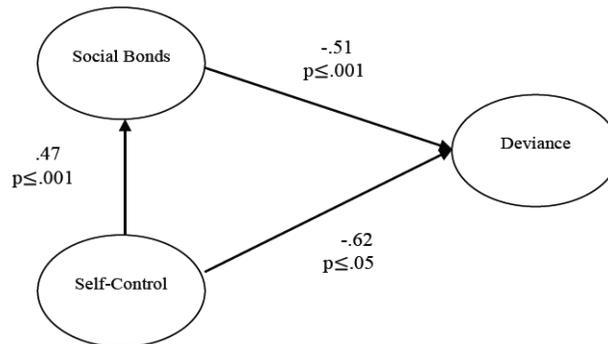
C. Multiple Regression of Deviance on Social Bonds and Self-Control



The correct specification may be as depicted in Figure 2 below. The respecification portrayed in Figure 2 where social bonds mediate the effect of self-control on deviance eliminates the model specification error found in the multiple regression model in Figure 1.C, and results in an increase in the influence of self-control on deviance. While effect elevation is not a sufficient to adopt the respecified model, it, however, makes sense that the components of self-control (impulsivity, insensitivity, physicality, risk-taking, present orientation, and limited verbal capacity) can influence the formation of social bonds (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief). For example, insensitive individuals are unlikely to care for others and their opinions (attachment) and those who are impulsive may be limited in their ability to make a commitment to a conventional lifestyle and their capacity to develop conventional aspirations. Another interpretation of the elements of self-control is they can be interpreted as inhibitory rather than motivational factors.

The insensitive individual is limited in his or her chances to form attachments with conventional significant others and to take into consideration the impact of his or her behavior on them. Sensitivity increases our attachments and our consideration of the consequences of our behavior for others. The caring relationships that represent sensitivity are clearly inhibitors. The coefficients in Figure 2, however, indicate that the decision to commit a particular act of deviance is relatively more strongly associated with self-control than with self-control through social bonds.

Figure 2: Test of A Model Featuring the Indirect Effects of Self-Control and the Direct Effects of Social Bonds on Deviance



6. Discussion

Both social bonds and self-control have a significant influence on self-reported deviant behavior. In their seminal work of 1990 on their general theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi point out that those with low self-control have difficulty maintaining stable relationships. This is an indication of poor attachment, and like crime, crime equivalents, employment instability, and poor academic performance can be seen as a consequence of low self-control. Social bonds can be viewed as part of the measurement model rather than the causal or conceptual model. For example, those who do not invest in a conventional career (commitment) are not concerned about the long-term implications of their actions, which is an aspect of the concept of self-control. Social bonds can also be seen as an intervening or mediating variable. An instance of this is that those who are impulsive and self-centered do not form the attachment to others and commitment to conventional society that help them to resist the temptation of crime.

However, the statistical association between the measure of self-control and the probability of committing the crime was stronger than that representing the influence of social bonds. Self-control better fits rapid and holistic situational assessment or snap judgment than do social bonds. Traits like impulsivity, insensitivity, risk-taking, and present orientation strike me as more closely related to a quick and general assessment of the consequences of a situation than do bonds such as attachment to conventional others and commitment. If opportunities to commit crimes arise suddenly and quickly and if crime requires little planning as Gottfredson and Hirschi claim (1990), I would expect the decision to be made quickly and not by pondering consequences. In addition, the personality characteristics posited by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) to represent low self-control (impulsivity, insensitivity, physicality, risk-taking, present orientation, and verbal capacity) fit the definition of inhibitory factors as well as social bonds. For example, those who are sensitive are inhibited by caring about others, including significant others and victims, and those who are risk-averse are limited in the chances they will take. This study concludes that self-control affects social bonds as they do crime and crime equivalents. For instance, self-control traits such as insensitivity and impulsivity can affect the formation of attachment with others and aspirations and ability to succeed in conventional ways, e.g., school performance and employment stability. The present research regards the elements of social bonds as variables influenced by a personality characteristic. The conceptual model that best characterizes this statistical relationship is self-control influences elements of social bonds similar to the way it influences outcomes like crime, academic performance, employment success, and stability in relationships.

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