

The Relationship between Involvement, Strain, and the Criminality of Fathers of At-Risk Children

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Abstract:

Robert Agnew proposed a new version of strain theory in 1992. In this article, Agnew argued that strain is not only a result of the blocked opportunity to achieve goals as Merton had argued, but that strain also results from the removal of positively valued stimuli and the presence of negative stimuli. With such a theory, criminologist had focused on how this may explain juvenile delinquency. Yet very little attention was given to how this may affect adult criminality as well. Similarly, Hirschi (1969) presented social control theory as a means of describing the causes of juvenile delinquency. While these theories have been repeatedly tested and supported with respect to delinquency, they have rarely been used to describe adult criminality. This paper intends to compare the utility of Agnew's general strain theory and Hirschi's control theory in explaining the criminal behavior of fathers. For general strain theory, it is predicted that fathers who have either high contact and low relationship quality or who have low contact and high relationship quality will have significantly higher criminal activity than those who have high contact and relationship quality or low contact and relationship quality. Conversely, social control theory predicts that fathers who have low relationship qualities with their children are more likely to commit criminal acts. This paper aims to ascertain which of these hypotheses is more accurate.

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Chapter 1: Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine how the father-child relationship and contact frequency affect the degree of criminal activity for fathers. Investigating such a relationship would help to understand variables related to the occurrence of crime and could have applications for social policies on non-residential males' involvement in their children's lives as a means of crime prevention. This positivist, quantitative study will compare social control and general strain theories, by means of multiple regressions for explaining the relationship between adult male parents' self-reported family involvement and their classification of criminal misconduct.

Data from Dr. McLanahan's Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study are used. This study is a longitudinal study designed to research health and development of low-income children, the impact of family relationships and dynamics on child wellbeing, and the impact of social policies on family relationships and child wellbeing. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is a nationally representative survey of birth cohorts from 1998 through 2000 that are measured at the child's age one, three, and five. The surveys were administered through telephone and field interviews of both the mother and the father of the children beginning at the hospital after the birth of the child. The sample of approximately 5,000 children was drawn from a stratified random sample of all U.S. cities which had a population of 200,000 or greater. The cities were stratified based on labor market conditions and policy environments to gain diversity. The study also over sampled unmarried parents and children, approximately 3,700, to demonstrate the effects of single parenting on children's wellbeing.

Due to such over-sampling and the types of measures applied in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, there is a unique data set present that will allow a rare look at

non-traditional families and the circumstances that surround and develop for each family. This study aims to examine father-child relationships and how it correlates to criminal behavior in adults. Given the conditions of the fathers this study is trying to evaluate, the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is important in that it has managed to specifically target fathers in non-traditional families through their methods. Additionally, unlike previous studies, the measures used by Dr. McLanahan allow for a direct and simultaneous study of father-child relationships and the prospective criminality of the father.

Keeping men involved in family life has become a challenge due to out-of-wedlock births and high divorce rates; however, their staying involved may have an impact on recidivism rates as well as preventing first time offenses. Traditional theories of criminality, such as control (Hirschi 1969) and social bonding, use social integration to describe correlates of crime. More concretely, individuals who report tighter networks of family and peer relationships are less likely to commit crime. As a different viewpoint, strain theories see deviant behaviors as a result of frustrations in the inability to achieve societal goals through legitimate means. Robert Agnew (1992) extends strain theory to include frustrations through the loss of positive stimuli and the presence of negative stimuli. When examining these theories, however, it is important to notice that neither is explicitly used to discuss family relationships and deviant activity among non-adolescents. It is my intention to do so. Using the Fragile Families data, I will examine how fathers who have differing degrees of contact with their children as well as differing degrees of attachment changes the propensity or contact with the criminal justice system for those fathers. This study will be an empirical test of Agnew's version of strain theory and Hirschi's version of control theory in their explanations of crime.

According to Agnew's general strain theory, two situations result in low criminal activity. Such situations would be when: 1) The father and child have frequent contact and high relationship quality and 2) When there is infrequent contact and poor relationship quality between father and child. Conversely, general strain theory would describe two alternate scenarios that lend themselves to criminal activities. These scenarios are: 1) When there is frequent contact between father and child combined with a low relationship quality and 2) When there is infrequent contact between father and child, but a high quality of relationship. Using Hirschi's control theory, a different prediction may be reached. That is, for social control theory, criminal activity among fathers would be seen more when the father reports low relationship qualities with his children.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.1 Durkheim Revisited:

The basis for general strain theory can be traced to the writings of Durkheim. In 1893, Durkheim published *De la Division du Travail Social*, later translated into *The Division of Labor in Society*, which contained his prevailing notion of anomie. Anomie refers to the lack of solidarity among society as a result of changing societal organizations and divisions of labor (Durkheim 1964). That is, with rapid change, society is not able to sufficiently regulate the relations within itself. Given this, anomie then leads to a discrepancy between “societal conditions and individual opportunities for growth, fulfillment, and productivity within society” (Shoemaker 2005: 97). In this, Durkheim implies that there are individual goals that may not be achieved through legitimate societal means. This in turn creates a sense of alienation and frustration. It is the inability for society to regulate such inconsistencies that results in different forms of “social maladies” (Vold et al. 2002).

It is important to note, however, that Durkheim was not focused on explaining deviant behaviors and criminal activities. Instead, Durkheim related his idea of anomie to economic conditions. In *The Division of Labor in Society* anomie was discussed as a result of rapid economic change between states of mechanical solidarity, having similar functions, and an organic form consisting of diversified labor (Vold et al. 2002). It is seen here that anomie is a transitory concept. It was not until four years later that Durkheim first introduced the theory of anomie as directly relating to deviance when he published *Le Suicide* in 1897. Even then he continued to relate suicide to patterns of economic disparity and sharp economic growth (Curran and Renzetti 2001). Here, suicide, a deviant behavior, is fostered through a state where norms rise above any legitimate means of procurement (Vold et al. 2002). Durkheim’s

focus on economic conditions limits the conceptualization for anomie to apply to other specific goals and means (Shoemaker 2005).

Furthermore, despite the implications for individual interpretation, Durkheim demonstrated that human behavior is dictated by social factors rather than biological or psychological means (Curran and Renzetti 2001). Durkheim still, however, argued that humans have innate needs and desires that are the root of anomie (Curran and Renzetti 2001). This is what is pointed to as a weakness in Durkheim's theory of anomie. How can there be an overall control of human behavior without being translated into individual influences? In other words, individual interpretations to social influences and conditions are commonly utilized in theories. Shoemaker (2005) argues that they are necessary in the complete understanding of theories of behavior.

Emile Durkheim developed his theory of anomie in an attempt to describe human behavior as a result of social conditions. In the process, the idea of incorporating individual interpretations of social factors was ignored. Also, Durkheim contended that his idea of anomie is maintained in the economic model and corporations and not in institutions such as family, education, and religion (Durkheim 1951). Lastly, Durkheim understood anomie to be a temporary state that occurs during the transition between economic states. As a result, the theory of anomie as described by Durkheim is not an effective means of describing instigates to criminal behaviors. Anomie, however, is important in future literature on deviant behavior, especially in the writings of Merton.

2.2 Merton Revisited:

Robert Merton used Durkheim's anomie theory to contribute to the understanding of how deviant behavior is produced through social conditions. Like Durkheim, Merton also

focused on the economic aspect of societal conditions. Merton, though, made an alteration to the description of anomie. For Merton, the needs and desires of wealth are not a natural characteristic of human kind; instead, they originate in culture (Merton 1964). A prime example of this, as described by Vold et al. (2002), is the defined goal of accumulating wealth in western capitalist societies. If one does not accept such a goal, they are looked upon as lazy or undetermined. This lays out the difference in the definition of anomie. For Merton's strain theory, anomie is the frustration and alienation one experiences when a society's cultural defined goals and the legitimate means of achieving those goals are in disequilibrium (Merton 1957).

Unlike Durkheim, Merton's theory of anomie is not a temporary state, but a continual phenomenon. This is due to Merton (1957) rooting his definition of anomie in culture where culture specifies accepted norms, mores, and institutionalized means which every member of a society are expected to regard in their pursuit of approved goals. Given that every society possesses shared norms stemming from culture, there is always the ability for anomie to take place. Merton also distinguishes strain theory from Durkheim's discussion of anomie by outlining individual reactions to the strain anomie produces. While conformity is acknowledged as the most common reaction to strain, Merton describes four other reactions that produce deviant behaviors (1957). Depending on the individual's acceptance and rejection of the cultural goals or institutionalized means, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion are possible reactions. The following chart displays the modes of adaptation in regards to cultural goals and institutional means as Merton (1957) described.

Figure 1: Merton's Modes of Individual Adaptation

Mode of Adaptation	Cultural Goals*	Institutionalized Means*
Conformity	+	+
Innovation	+	-
Ritualism	-	+
Retreatism	-	-
Rebellion	±	±
* + = acceptance; - = rejection; ± = rejection and substitution		

Through this, Merton leaves a lingering question about the individual interpretations of anomie (Shoemaker 2005). What is the true relationship between individual behavior and anomie? Merton maintains that the answer lies in collectivities of individuals with varying anomie (Merton 1957). To many, this is an unsatisfactory answer. It is still to be determined why people commit crime while others in similar states of anomie do not. In addition, although theoretically Merton's notion of anomie can be applied to any type of social institution, he continues to focus on economic conditions which present some of the same challenges Durkheim received. Furthermore, Merton uses strain theory as an attempt to explain lower class crime. He does not attempt to discuss crime in all socioeconomic statuses. For these reasons, Merton's strain theory is not able to sufficiently explain deviant behavior in all cases. In response to this perceived shortcoming, Agnew formulated a revised strain theory that can account for deviant behavior for people in various circumstances.

2.3 Agnew's General Strain Theory:

Robert Agnew, while not using the terminology of anomie, uses Merton's description of anomie in his discussion of types of strain. In his 1992 article, Agnew argues that there are three forms of strain. The first form is the "actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued goals" (Agnew 1992: 47). In essence this is Merton's theory of anomie (Shoemaker

2005). Despite borrowing this concept, Agnew describes why it has failed in previous attempts to understand delinquent behavior. First, it is argued that past theories incorporating this form of anomie cannot explain delinquency which occurs in social classes other than the lower class. Second, these theories ignore possible goals other than the search for monetary achievement. Third, in concurrence with the first argument, past theories have neglected to discuss barriers other than social class in achieving one's goals. Lastly, while theories such as Merton's discuss individuals having a choice in how to react to strain, they do not explain what causes some to commit delinquency while some do not (Agnew 1992). While Agnew recognizes the shortcomings of previous theories based on such strain, it is still recognized as a major contribution which is in need of modification.

Within this strain, Agnew identifies three subtypes that an individual may encounter. The first subtype results from the disjunction between one's aspirations and achievements. Agnew, however, acknowledges that aspirations are often higher than one may reasonably achieve and will therefore produce only a mild amount of strain (Curran and Renzetti 2001). The second subtype results from the disparity between expectations and achievements (Curran and Renzetti 2001). Since expectations are more likely for an individual to consider realistic, more strain is produced in their failure to achieve such expectations. Lastly, there exists a sense of strain in individual's perception of fairness compared to actual outcomes (Agnew 1992; Curran and Renzetti 2001). The importance of this third subtype relates to the idea that sense of fairness exists in all arenas of life, not solely in economic deprivation, and thus strain extends to these same arenas (Agnew and Passas 1997). The argument that strain may occur in an individual's perception lays the foundation for Agnew's other ideas of strain.

Agnew's next two concepts of strain discuss strain as a result of an individual's interaction with their environmental surroundings. Agnew addresses his second form of strain as "the actual or anticipated removal (loss) of positively valued stimuli from the individual" (Agnew 1992: 57). Conversely, the third type of strain refers to the "the actual or anticipated presentation of negative or noxious stimuli" (Agnew 1992:58). Here, Agnew presents the idea of negative emotions. For both of these types of strain, the key idea is that the individual is confronted with stimuli that is unwanted and inescapable (Vold et al. 2002). This, in turn, creates a reaction such as delinquency. It is important to note, however, that Agnew does not argue that such strains inevitably lead to criminal acts, but that delinquency is one of multiple ways a person might deal with such strain. Agnew argued that there are certain "conditioning factors" such as temperament, intelligence, and conventional social support that help guide an individual to choose how to react to strain (Conklin 2001).

Through his argument, we see that Agnew has devised a general theory of crime (Vold et al. 2002). He has outlined strain in a way that encompasses multiple arenas of life instead of limiting it to an economic function. In turn, this establishes barriers to achieving goals in more ways than that described in a class structure model. Because of this, Agnew's general strain theory accomplishes what Durkheim and Merton failed to do by establishing how strain, at either the structural or the individual level, can cause behaviors from people in all classes, races, genders, and so forth. He has also been able to describe why some people choose delinquent acts while others do not through his discussion of conditioning factors.

2.4 Empirical Tests of General Strain Theory:

While generally being applied to explanations of juvenile delinquency, the empirical support of general strain theory is important as a basis for asserting a similar strain process for those who commit adult crime. Agnew's argument that strain is not only produced from the inability to achieve valued goals through legitimate channels, but also from the presence of negative stimuli or absence of positive stimuli is tested in an article written with Raskin White in 1992. In this study, Agnew and Raskin White found that "strain measures of the type described in general strain theory have a relatively substantial effect on delinquency" and that delinquency is negatively related to parental attachment factors (1992: 493). In 2001, Broidy also tested Agnew's hypothesis. She found the predicted effects of strain in the removal of positive stimuli and the presence of negative stimuli. Broidy (2001) also concluded that strain significantly increases the likelihood of illegitimate outcomes.

Moreover, Paternoster and Mazerolle tested Agnew's hypotheses. In this analysis, the hypothesis that juveniles who have poor relations with adults, including bad relationships with parents, commit significantly more acts of delinquency (Paternoster and Mazerolle 1994). Again we see that the parent/child relationship is a contributing factor in delinquency. This finding supports the hypothesis for this paper in which poor relationship quality with parents increases the likelihood of criminal acts. Also, in their early test of general strain theory, Paternoster and Mazerolle (1994) describe that Agnew does not argue that delinquency is the reaction to strain, but one possible response.

Timothy Breznia (1996) extends this argument in an article where he provides support for delinquency as an adaptation to aversive environments. Breznia once again describes Agnew's forms of strain as the loss of a parent or the maltreatment by a parent. Breznia

concludes that “strain is positively associated with the experience of several negative emotions, and delinquency appears to reduce the impact of strain on those emotions” (Breznia 1996:52).

In addition, Agnew, Breznia, and Wright (2002) discuss the strain leads to negative emotionality, which, in turn, results in a higher propensity for delinquent behavior. General strain theory argues that strain creates a pressure for corrective actions. In this analysis, family strain and attachment to parents are measured as a source of negative emotionality. It was concluded that family strain, conflict with parents, and parents’ feelings of lose control were all positively and significantly related to delinquency. Furthermore, attachment to parents and parental firmness showed a significantly negative relationship with delinquency (Agnew et al. 2002). Thus, “delinquency is higher among those who experience family...strain” (Agnew et al. 2002).

Cumulatively, these studies support Agnew’s general strain theory. These studies give credence to Agnew’s arguments that the removal of positive stimuli and the presence of negative stimuli lead to strain, which in turn, leads to delinquency as one means of coping with the strain. Moreover, these studies argue that familial factors have a significant role in such strains. This finding also supports the hypothesis made by this paper in arguing that criminal acts are a result of strain. These studies lack, however, in their analysis of who endures strain. While these studies focus on the juvenile, it is my intention to argue that strain has a similar impact on adults. It is shown that the weakened bond between parents and child is positively associated with the delinquency of the juvenile, but could there also be negative responses from the parents as well? I contend that fathers who have either low contact and high attachment or high contact and low attachment to their children are more likely to report

contact with the criminal justice system than those who do not experience this strain. It is the intention of this paper to examine whether there is a link between the strain caused by the lack of familial cohesion and contact with the criminal justice system among fathers.

2.5 Hirschi's Social Control Theory:

While anomie and strain theorists, such as Agnew, concentrate on finding the answer to what causes deviance, Hirschi's social control theory asks the question, why do people conform (Thio 2001)? At the heart of this question is an implication as to what actually does cause deviance. For Hirschi, deviance is a naturally occurring phenomenon of human nature (Thio 2001). In his publication, *Causes of Delinquency* (1969:31), Hirschi states, "we are all animals and thus naturally capable of committing criminal acts." Therefore, it is necessary to find what factors prevent individuals from being deviant. Social control theory hypothesizes that social institutions, such as family, school, and peers are just such factors (Shoemaker 2005).

Social control theory argues that the social bond an individual develops to society through these institutions ensures conformity to societies norms (Curran and Renzetti 2001; Hirschi 1969; Shoemaker 2005; Thio 2001). It is then either through a weak bond, or a bond that has been broken, that delinquent acts occur (Curran and Renzetti 2001). That is, individuals who do not have adequate investments into one or more social institutions, or have been separated from one (e.g. being removed from one's family), do not have a connection to society's norms. The result of this lack of bonds is deviant behavior.

Hirschi explains that there are four elements that are necessary for an individual to establish a strong social bond; involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief (Hirschi 1969). These four elements may be described as follows.

2.5.1 Involvement:

Involvement is the most straightforward concept of Hirschi's social bond theory. It may be defined as simply the amount of time or participation one has in legitimate, conventional activities (Curran and Renzetti 2001; Hirschi 1969; Shoemaker 2005; Thio 2001; Vold et al. 2002). In general, involvement has been measured as time spent on an activity. For the purposes of this study, it would concur with my hypothesis that a father who does not spend time with his children would develop a weakened social bond, and therefore be susceptible to deviant behavior and crime.

However, it has been shown in past research that involvement alone may not be correlated to criminal behavior. Of the research on involvement, it was found that children who spend more time reading, watching TV, dating, and working have higher delinquency than those who do not (Agnew and Peterson 1989; Curran and Renzetti 2001; Hirschi 1969; Vold et al. 2002). While Hirschi tries to argue that this is because those who participate in these activities are less connected to conventional activities, they are, nevertheless, conventional activities (non-delinquent) in-and-of themselves.

While such findings seem troublesome to the concept of involvement, there may still be a practical use in the measurement of adult criminality. Osgood et al. (1996) describe how Hirschi's conception of conventional activities falls short of explaining differences between delinquents and non-delinquents. Osgood argues that the principle of routine activities is that crime is dependent upon opportunity, and opportunity increases as unsupervised time increases. Hawdon ([1996] 1999) supports this through visibility, or the amount that routine activity patterns are centered on institutional supervision. Therefore, criminal activity has been found to have a positive association with routinized activities that are unstructured and

lack an authority figure (Hawdon [1996] 1999; Osgood 1996). Osgood (1996) describes an authority figure as one who has a role in a situation and carries a responsibility for attempting to exert social control in response to deviance. It is then appropriate to use family as a type of authority figure. Therefore, fathers who spend more time at home with their families should have less unsupervised time, and therefore participate in less deviant behaviors.

Hawdon ([1996] 1999) also uses the idea of instrumentality in describing the use of involvement in analysis of criminal behavior. Instrumentality refers to both direct and indirect controls. Directly, instrumentality of routine activities, or the presence of goals, controls deviant behavior through promoting non-deviant action and ostracizing those who are deviant as a means of achieving the goal of the activity. Indirectly, instrumentality promotes high visibility and more supervised time by an authority figure. Ultimately, Hawdon (1999) concludes that young adults in a recreational (unsupervised) activity pattern are more likely to use drugs. Similarly, Osgood (1996:651) concluded that “situations conducive to deviance are especially prevalent in unstructured socializing activities with peers that occur in the absence of authority figures.” Given the concepts of visibility and instrumentality, involvement is still a valid measure of adult criminality.

Moreover, studies of social control theory have primarily focused on juvenile delinquency. In such studies factors like being in the workforce might promote delinquency due to a juvenile’s weak connection to their traditional conventional activities such as school. If applying social control theory to adult criminality, involvement in the workforce and family may still provide a mediating variable in criminal activity. For example, Laub and Sampson’s (1993) found that of the 70 life histories they studied, repeatedly the respondents noted that the drops in their criminal activities were due to involvement in “steady work” and “family

responsibilities.” Therefore, using an involvement concept for social control theory, it may be predicted that the more a father is involved in his child’s life or children’s lives, the less likely it is that he would be involved in criminal behavior.

2.5.2 Attachment:

Attachment can be defined as an emotional investment with a group and a sense of caring for the feelings and opinions of that group (Adler et al. 2004; Hirschi 1969; Shoemaker 2005; Thio 2001). Hirschi (1969) specifically describes the attachment variable in terms of peers, school, and family in keeping with his conventional activities. He goes on to show how attachment is related to delinquency by stating, “If a person does not care about the wishes and expectations of other people - then he is to that extent not bound by the norms. He is free to deviate” (Hirschi 1969:18). It is seen that society’s norms are internalized through attachment (Curran and Renzetti 2001; Vold et al. 2002). Therefore, without attachment, an individual is free to deviate.

Hirschi (1969) found attachment to produce the strongest effect in reducing the likelihood of delinquency. That is, “boys who were closely attached to parents were less likely to report committing delinquent acts” (Vold et al. 2002:185). In sum, Hirschi (1969:98–99) concludes that a “lack of attachment to the parent is to result in delinquency” because the “child does not have to consider the consequences of his actions for his relationship with his parents.” Further studies on juvenile delinquency routinely point to the family as a regulator of behavior as well. Many point to parental attachment as the leading institution of social control (Liska and Reed 1985). Van Voorhies (1988) also argues that overall family quality is a strong predictor of delinquency. Rankin and Wells (1990) used measures of how much the child likes his or her parents, how much time the child spent with

them, positive communication between the child and parents, and how close the child felt to his or her parents to examine delinquency. They found that both indirect and direct controls of parental attachment are negatively related to delinquency (Rankin and Wells 1990).

Problems in such studies, however, have raised questions about the role of the family in delinquency. For instance, Van Voorhies (1988) is criticized for failing to determine which aspects of the family contribute the most to delinquency (Curran and Renzetti 2001). The Rankin and Wells (1990) study addressed this shortcoming and used similar variables to the current study. A weakness, though, is that Rankin and Wells only used these variables to explain delinquency, not adult crime. If losing their social bond to the family results in delinquency for children, then I would predict a similar result for a parent who similarly loses her or his bond. However, studies have not examined this relationship. Along with not addressing adult criminality in these analyses, these studies also fail in studying parental attachment since the data come from asking the kids to report on parental behaviors and attitudes. Although Hirschi defined attachment to parents in terms of socialization, internalization of norms, and emotional bonds, Curran and Renzetti (2001) note that there has not been an observed definition for parental attachment in recent studies. For these reasons, it is important that this study return to the definition of attachment for adults, interview the parents, and determine what relationship attachment, more specifically the emotional bond, has for controlling parental behaviors.

2.5.3 Commitment and Belief:

Commitment and belief are the remaining two concepts that Hirschi described as factors in delinquency. This study will pay little attention to these, however, due to practical and theoretical reasons. Primarily, the data set being used in this study does not contain the

appropriate measures that would be used to clearly define and study the commitment and belief concepts in which Hirschi developed. However, the loss of these two concepts is not an overwhelming barrier to this study due to theoretical reasoning.

Commitment is defined as an investment of time and energy one puts into certain conventional activities (Hirschi 1969). Previously identified conventional activities include work, school, and the family (Thio 2001). Shoemaker (2005) describes energies as being emotions, money, and effort. It is important to note here that the attributes used to describe commitment are the definitions for involvement (time) and attachment (emotions). Therefore, when investing time (involvement) and energy (attachment) on these activities, a sense of commitment to the activity is developed (Curran and Renzetti 2001). Consequently, the underlying theme in commitment, being attached and involved in conventional activities, is that people develop a stake in “playing by the rules”.

The idea of having a stake in an activity implies risk. There is an implication that the activity may be lost. Hirschi recognizes this by discussing commitment as a type of cost-benefit analysis. A would-be delinquent “must consider the cost of his deviant behavior” (Hirschi 1969:20). That is, an individual contemplating committing delinquent acts evaluates the attachment and involvement they have accumulated with an activity and decide whether the potential deviant act may be worth the loss of such a commitment to that activity. Since the defining characteristics of commitment are the definitions for involvement and attachment, and since Hirschi uses a cost-benefit discussion of commitment, it seems that commitment would be highly correlated with either involvement or attachment. Therefore, examining attachment and involvement should give us a good reference as to how commitment affects criminality. This line of thought is also supported by Hirschi’s (1969)

argument that commitment, involvement, attachment, and belief are also positively associated with one another. Moreover, Kempf (1993) has shown through a meta-analysis of control theory that measurements of commitment have shown mixed results, and even findings in the opposite directions at times. It is therefore not vital to examine commitment in this analysis.

A similar argument may be made concerning belief. Belief is defined as a strong acceptance and conviction that the rules of society should be obeyed (Curran and Renzetti 2001; Hirschi 1969; Shoemaker 2005; Thio 2001). That is, the extent to which an individual thinks that breaking a rule is wrong alters the likelihood that the individual will commit delinquent behaviors. Again, Kempf (1993) notes that attachment and belief are not independent concepts, and studies have shown that attachment precedes belief. Therefore, belief is highly correlated with attachment and involvement (Kempf 1993; Shoemaker 2005). This is supported by Curran and Renzetti (2001:148) when they state, “An individual who is strongly attached to his or her parents and care about their feelings will also be likely to express a strong belief in the moral validity of social rules.” This seems to be reasonable if one assumes that the family promotes and adheres to the laws of society. Since it is shown that belief is dependent upon attachment, it is therefore unnecessary to specifically measure belief in this analysis.

These arguments for abstaining from observing measurements of commitment and belief, however, are beyond the scope of this study. The data source used for this secondary data analysis lacks the appropriate measures to observe the defined concepts of commitment or belief. Also, the need to include such measures is called into question through further studies on Hirschi’s social control theory. For these reasons, both theoretical and practical, commitment and belief will not be discussed further in this study.

2.6 Attachment and Involvement in Previous Research:

As stated previously, Hirschi (1969) found that delinquency was inversely related to the bonds of familial attachment. Although, little to no research has used this finding to examine adult criminality, some of the findings on further delinquency research point to attributes that may help describe crime among adults. For instance, Nye (1958) examined father-son and father-daughter relationships and found that nearly all of the associations were consistent with control theory with a large amount of them significant. This specifically refers to the relationship quality between fathers and their children as a cause for deviant behavior. Likewise, Rosen (1985) found that the presence of a father in the home of the family did decrease delinquency.

Additionally, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950) found affection of the father for his son and cohesiveness of family was two significant factors that determined delinquency. This finding supports this paper's predictions of criminal behavior among adults by citing that involvement and attachment are significantly related to deviant behavior. What Nye, Rosen, and the Glueck's also contribute is the idea that a father's presence alters patterns of behaviors. This is supported by Rankin and Kern (1994). They found that strong attachments of youth to both parents are associated with lower delinquency, as compared with strong attachment to one parent (Rankin and Kern 1994). While attachment seems to be bolstered by presence in the home, it is also important to note that delinquency is higher in intact homes where there is constant arguing (Curran and Renzetti 2001). These findings support the predictions presented in Table 1 above.

Few other studies have attempted to demonstrate control variables among adult deviance. Rutter et al. (1990) have shown that marital cohesion helps explain adult deviance. Laub and Sampson (1993:304) reproduce this finding by showing “social bonds in adulthood – especially attachment to the labor force and cohesive marriage (or cohabitation) – explain criminal behavior regardless of prior differences in criminal propensity.” They also found that criminal acts such as physical abuse and non-support of children were more likely to occur when there were deteriorating social bonds (Laub and Sampson 1993). These findings not only support the predicted outcomes of criminality proposed in this study, but also demonstrate that such influences on deviant behavior as attachment and involvement may also be applied to the adult population as well as to juveniles.

2.7 Predictions from the Literature:

Robert Agnew’s general strain theory argues that strain occurs when there is a persistent exposure to negative stimuli or a lack of exposure to positively valued stimuli. Given this, it is predicted that both the father who has high attachment with a child he does not see, and the father who is in constant contact with a child when he has a poor attachment to, would endure more strain and therefore be more likely to commit crime. Hirschi’s social control theory states that criminal behavior is modified by the social controls that are exerted on an individual. It may therefore be predicted that the lower relationship quality a father has with a child, although slightly affected by amount of contact, the more likely that father would be free to commit criminal activity. These theoretical results are depicted in figure 2.

Figure 2: Theoretical Predictions of Father Criminality

		Robert Agnew	Travis Hirschi
Contact	Attachment	General Strain Theory	Social Control Theory
High	High	Low Criminal Activity	Low Criminal Activity
High	Low	Criminal Activity	Moderate to High Criminal Activity
Low	High	Criminal Activity	Moderate to Low Criminal Activity
Low	Low	Low Criminal Activity	High Criminal Activity

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Data:

To examine the relationship between contact, attachment, and crime, a secondary data analysis will be performed on Dr. McLanahan's Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is a nationally representative survey of birth cohorts from 1998 through 2000 that are measured at the child's age one, three, and five. The surveys were administered through telephone and field interviews of both the mother and the father of the children beginning at the hospital after the birth of the child. The sample of 4,898 children was drawn from a stratified random sample of all U.S. cities which had a population of 200,000 or greater. The cities were stratified based on labor market conditions and policy environments to gain diversity. The study also over sampled unmarried parents and children, approximately 3,700, to demonstrate the effects of single parenting on children's wellbeing.

This study, funded by the Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, interviewed fathers who had varying degrees of contact with their children. This study asked respondents' background information as well as the parental responsibilities and interactions the respondents' had with their children. The survey also included questions regarding the respondents' contact with the criminal justice system. With this information present, the Fragile Families Study will allow me to test for relationships between respondents' contact with their families, attachment the respondents have with their families, and the respondents contact with the criminal justice system.

3.2 Limitations:

While the Fragile Families Study reasonably measures what this study intends, there are shortcomings in the data that limit my analysis. First, the study was meant to research the wellbeing of children. Interviewing the fathers was a secondary concern and the study design limits the amount of data collected from fathers at various points. As a result, the questionnaire changes from year to year in accordance with the original study's need. These changes hinder the ability for this paper to perform a longitudinal analysis of father involvement, strain, contact, and criminal activities. Furthermore, while the survey items are utilized in this study, there are inevitable inaccuracies with how variables are measured. Such errors in measurement will be discussed as I describe each variable.

3.3 Measures:

3.3.1 Dependent Variable:

Current Charges Pending The variable is coded as a dummy variable with 1 identifying the respondent as having criminal charges pending and 0 identifying those who do not. As a limitation to the Fragile Families Study, the survey items regarding criminal activities are limited. The data suggest different types of criminal paths for each respondent. However, time order is questioned on many of these items. That is, it is not confirmed when certain criminal acts were committed in relation to the respondent becoming a father. Therefore, this study's examination of the criminal behaviors of the respondents is limited to whether the respondent currently has charges pending against them. This is the single factor that lets us know that there were possible criminal acts committed after the birth of the respondent's child.

3.3.2 Independent Variables:

Contact The amount of contact a father has with his children is crucial to the test of involvement in control theory and strain theory in its intention of describing the loss of positive stimuli with low contact, as well as the presence of negative stimuli with high contact. In this study, items were taken to determine the contact a respondent generally has with his child per year. This was based on whether the respondent reported having full custody of his child. If the respondent had full custody, the weeks reported of not having the child was subtracted from 52. If the respondent did not have custody, the weeks expected to be with the child were added to 0. This results in a ratio variable ranging from 0 to 52 weeks per year the respondents will spend with their children.

Attachment Relationship quality, for the purposes of this study, will be defined two-fold. First, the amount of time the respondent spends playing with the child is to be used as an indicator of father involvement. Second, how a father feels about being a parent will be taken into account and discussed as strain.

Father Involvement is measured with an eight item scale where the respondents were asked how often they play games such as peek-a-boo, sings songs, reads stories, tells stories, plays with toys, takes the child to visit relatives, shows physical affection, and puts the child to bed. Each item is on a 0 to 7 days per week scale. Combining these 8 items results in a variable with a range of 0 to 56 times a week the respondent plays with their child. The alpha reliability for this item was .86. The items described may be seen in the appendix.

Strain is measured through four items asking respondents their feelings about being a parent. These questions measure how the respondent feels as to whether parenting is harder than they thought it would be, if they feel trapped by their responsibility as a parent, if they find their

children to be more work than pleasure, and if they feel worn out from raising a family. These items were from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) and taken together reflect the strain of being a father that the respondents experience. The alpha reliability for this item was .74. The items comprising these indices are presented in the appendix.

3.3.3 Controls:

For this analysis, the influence of contact and relationship quality on adult criminality will be analyzed while controlling for four additional factors. The respondent's income, ethnicity (African Americans, Hispanics, and other races compared to Whites), education (high school diploma and less as compared to those with higher education), and prior criminal record will be included in the analysis as control variables. Education is an ordinal variable with the categories of less than a high school education, have a high school degree or GED, or have education beyond high school. These variables are being used for controls since they are known correlates of criminal activity (Adler et al. 2006). This will assure that things we know could explain crime are not overriding any findings that may occur.

3.4 Analysis Strategy:

The data in this study were analyzed using SPSS. Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, this analysis used a binary logistic regression to examine how the relationships between attachment, contact, and criminal charges were changed when adding in the interactions between father involvement, strain, and prior criminal record and the control variables already mentioned. The first model showed current charges pending regressed upon father involvement, strain, and contact. Models 2 added the interaction of father involvement and strain. Finally, in model 3, current charges pending is regressed upon father involvement,

strain, and contact while race, education, income, and prior criminal record are controlled.

These regressions may be seen in table 3.

Chapter 4: Analysis

A logistic regression was used to test the hypothesis that discordance between contact and attachment would increase the likelihood of one currently having criminal charges pending. As shown in Table 1 (Appendix), the sample is fairly well distributed over multiple categories. Of most importance, approximately 5% of the respondents report that they currently have criminal charges pending against them. This is a fairly large percentage considering the aim of the study was to examine the wellbeing of children. Keeping this in mind, it is surprising to see that the average contact a respondent reports having with their children is a little over two weeks a year (SD 10.22). This is lower than to be expected, however, and will be discussed later. It is also shown that the average respondent reports having 35 “play” times with their children each week with a standard deviation of 12. With a range of 0 to 56 play times, this shows that there is a wide variation in father involvement in this sample. Lastly, we see that the mean of the strain variable is approximately 8 on a scale from 1 to 16 (16 being frustrated).

The demographics of the respondents that have been used in this analysis are also well distributed. The average income per respondent was approximately \$22,500 with a standard deviation ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000. The education of the respondents was almost equally divided with approximately 34% having less than a high school education, 32% having a high school diploma or GED, and 34% having received education beyond high school. Conversely, the division of race in this study was skewed. Based on the sampling methods used to collect data for the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to target non-traditional families, minorities were over sampled. The sample was distributed by race as 20% white, 48% African American, 27% Hispanic, and 5% of other race. Lastly, with a

similar trend of having current charges pending, we see that a large portion of our sample, 20%, report having a criminal record for past activities. With the exception of contact, the sample provided for this analysis contains a high-quality distribution of respondents.

As reported in Table 2 (Appendix), the correlations between the independent variables and criminal charges pending hint that the hypothesis would be correct. The amount of father involvement and the way the father feels about parenting (strain) both have significant correlations in the direction predicted by the hypothesis. That is, the more a father is involved with their children, the less likely they are to have criminal charges pending against them, and the more strain a father feels about parenting, the more likely they are to have criminal charges pending. To further verify this, it can also be concluded that the more a father is involved with their children, the less likely they are to feel strain about parenting (sig. .001). However, contact was found to not have any correlations with either current charges pending, father involvement, or strain. This lack of correlation was further exposed after having run the logistic regression.

In model one of Table 3 (Appendix), we see that as shown by the correlations, the strain a father encounters from parenting significantly increase the chances of him having charges pending (odds ratio 1.156). That is, fathers who have a strained attachment with their children are 15% more likely to have criminal charges pending against them. Conversely, father involvement, while it is shown to reduce the likelihood of having criminal charges pending, is not significant. Furthermore, model 1 also shows that even without any controls in place, contact does not alter the likelihood of having criminal charges pending.

Next, when the interaction of father involvement and strain is added in model 2, neither father involvement, strain, contact, nor the interaction term show any significant

relationships to criminal charges pending. Therefore, without any mediating variables being introduced, the hypothesis that potential criminal activity, resulting from a dissonance between contact and attachment, may be rejected based on model 2. In total, both models 1 and 2 explained less than 1% of the variance in criminal charges pending.

Model 3 includes the control variables of race, education, income, and prior criminal record. It is shown that only income and having less than a high school education (as compared to having education beyond high school) had significant relationships to criminal charges pending. As would be predicted, higher income reduces the likelihood of having criminal charges pending. Also, having less education increases the possibility of having charges pending. Prior criminal record, as expected, had an extremely high positive relationship with currently having criminal charges pending. Race, however, did not contribute to the model in any significant way. Regardless, with the interaction term removed, model 3 illustrates few relationships between the independent variables and criminal charges pending when being controlled for by race, income, education, and prior criminal record. With these controls, only strain shows a significant relationship ($p < .05$) with criminal charges pending. Father involvement, as seen in models 1 and 2 are irrelevant. While this model explained the most variance, it only explained about 5% of current charges pending.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion:

Having observed the data, the hypothesis that discordance between contact and attachment increases the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system among the respondents' is not supported. While feelings of strain in parenting show significant relationships to the conduct of criminal activity, at no time did contact with the child alter such actions. And, only when being combined with prior criminal record did father involvement have any impact. Therefore, since contact and involvement with a child does not alter the behavior of an individual, the discordance between contact and attachment would not produce the criminal tendencies predicted by this hypothesis. What we do find from this analysis is that individual attitudes toward family tend to affect the likelihood of one getting caught, participating in, or being suspected of criminal activity. This finding counters the general thinking of criminologists who view crime as a result of a lack of controls surrounding an individual.

Despite this grim look at traditional criminologist thinking, it is not time to abandon such theories. Fundamental inadequacies in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study raise questions over how reliable such findings may be. First, the data were not constructed for the purposes of studying fathers' criminal activity and relationships with children, but to examine the wellbeing of the child in general. As a result, the surveys were not consistent in measuring the variables needed to complete the concepts of this theory. Additionally, due to the changing measures throughout the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, a longitudinal study was not able to be completed. In future research, a longitudinal view of

contact, attachment, and criminal behaviors among fathers would serve well in studying how the changes in strain, involvement, and contact influence behavior.

Second, the key concept of contact with the child was not substantially formed. Because it was never directly asked how much time the father spent with his child, contact had to be inferred by whether the father maintained full custody of the child. This was then altered by the reported weeks the child spent with someone else (if the father had custody) or the number of weeks the father was supposed to have the child (if the father did not have custody). This calculation, while producing a vague notion of contact, was not sufficient in giving an appropriate range. The average time spent with children was a minimal two weeks per year. Even with only 5% of the fathers reporting they had full custody, it is unreasonable to think that the rest, who may have shared custody (it is unknown how many), only have contact with their children for two weeks out of the year. Therefore, with the key variable in measuring strain theory and control theory being so weakly constructed, it is necessary to evaluate the hypothesis put forward by this paper using more complete measures than what were to be found through this secondary data analysis.

5.2 Future Research:

The data provided by the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study is exceptional in its ability to target fathers, especially those from non-traditional families. This research has provided a window into a part of society that is difficult to reach. Despite this rare look, shortcomings in the data have hindered the analysis of criminal activities among fathers with regards to general strain theory and control theory. With that in mind, future research is needed to complete the analysis started in this paper. The persistent finding of strain effecting charges pending and the occasional effect of father involvement have given a glimpse of possible correlations of contact, attachment, and criminal activity as described by general strain theory and control theory. Moreover, the issue of contact needs to be further examined with a wider variation of time spent with children to gain a more accurate picture of how contact alters behavior. Therefore, the examination of general strain theory and control theory as applied to adult fathers should not be dismissed due to this papers finding, but rather researched in a more direct path.

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Appendix

Measures:

Play Measures:

Activities	Days Per Week							
Plays games like "peek-a-boo" or "gotcha" with child	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sing songs or nursery rhymes to child	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Read stories to child	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tells stories to child	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Play inside with toys such as blocks or legos with child	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Take child to relatives	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hug or show affection to child	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Put child to bed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Feelings Toward Fatherhood Measures:

Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be. Do you...

- Strongly agree,1
- Somewhat agree,2
- Somewhat disagree, or3
- Strongly disagree?4

I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent. Do you...

- Strongly agree,1
- Somewhat agree,2
- Somewhat disagree, or3
- Strongly disagree?4

I find that taking care of my child(ren) is much more work than pleasure. Do you...

- Strongly agree,1
- Somewhat agree,2
- Somewhat disagree, or3
- Strongly disagree?4

I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from raising a family. Do you...

- Strongly agree,1
- Somewhat agree,2
- Somewhat disagree, or3
- Strongly disagree?4

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics:

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current Charges Pending	3345	.00	1.00	.0472	.21217
Father Involvement	2771	.00	56.00	35.0863	12.47566
Strain	2936	1.00	16.00	8.2081	2.71194
Contact	3365	.00	53.14	2.2630	10.22431
White	3950	.00	1.00	.2020	.40156
Black	3950	.00	1.00	.4795	.49964
Hispanic	3950	.00	1.00	.2704	.44421
Other Race	3950	.00	1.00	.0466	.21077
Income	3166	1.00	9.00	5.5407	2.46391
Education Less Than HS	4020	.00	1.00	.3428	.47470
Education HS or equivalent	4022	.00	1.00	.3294	.47007
Higher Education	4031	.00	1.00	.3433	.47488
Prior Criminal Record	3355	.00	1.00	.2018	.40139
Valid N (listwise)	2142				

Table 2: Bivariate Correlations

	Current Charges Pending	Father Involvement	Strain	Contact	White	Black	Hispanic	Other Race	Income	Education Less Than HS	Education HS or equivalent	Higher Education	Prior Criminal Record
Current Charges Pending	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Father Involvement	-.046*	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Strain	.083***	-.131***	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Contact	.030	-.031	.026	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
White	-.067**	.087***	.003	-.066**	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Black	.048*	-.082***	-.005	.064**	-.539***	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Hispanic	.024	-.008	-.036	-.012	-.343***	-.501***	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
Other Race	-.019	.029	.078***	.014	-.134***	-.195***	-.124***	1	---	---	---	---	---
Income	-.120***	.075**	-.071***	-.102***	.310***	-.224***	-.104***	.078***	1	---	---	---	---
Education < H.S.	.102***	-.067**	.078***	.035	-.182***	.002	.212***	-.063**	-.352***	1	---	---	---
Education H.S. or G.E.D.	.005	-.018	-.007	.034	-.107***	.142***	-.054*	-.005	-.113***	-.391***	1	---	---
Higher Education	-.102***	.070**	-.064**	-.061**	.256***	-.159***	-.126***	.082***	.416***	-.471***	-.561***	1	---
Prior Criminal Record	.199***	-.077***	.088***	.048*	-.020	.082***	-.060**	-.026	-.111***	.062**	.060**	-.123***	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

N=2142

TABLE 3: Regression Estimates and Odds Ratios for the Logistic Regression of Current Charges Pending on Father Involvement, Strain, Contact with Child, the interaction of Father Involvement and Strain, the interaction of Father Involvement and Prior Criminal Record, the interaction of Strain and Prior Criminal Record, Race, Education, Income, and Prior Criminal Record.

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3	
	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR
Father Involvement	-0.015 (-0.009)	0.985	-0.009 (-0.030)	0.991	-0.006 (-0.009)	0.994
Strain	0.145*** (-0.041)	1.156	0.167 (-0.108)	1.181	0.099* (-0.041)	1.104
Contact with Child	0.011 (-0.009)	1.011	0.011 (-0.009)	1.011	0.003 (-0.010)	1.003
Interaction of Father Involvement and Strain ¹			-0.001 (-0.003)	0.999		
Black ^a					0.624 (-0.390)	1.867
Hispanics ^a					0.768 (-0.419)	2.154
Other Race ^a					0.067 (-0.817)	1.069
Education Less Than H.S. ^b					0.785* (-0.349)	2.192
H.S. Degree or GED ^b					0.385 (-0.345)	1.47
Income					-0.133* (-0.056)	0.876
Prior Criminal Record					1.719*** (-0.245)	5.581
Chi-Square	18.02***		0.046		102.275***	
R-Square	0.008		0.008		0.047	
N of Cases	2142		2142		2142	

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors

^a White as the comparison category

^b Those with education beyond HS as the comparison category

***p < .001 **p < .01 *p < .05

¹ This analysis also examined the interaction of strain and prior criminal record and the interaction of father involvement and prior criminal record. Neither interaction showed significance.