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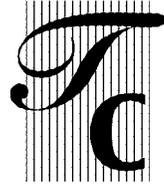
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## Refining control balance theory

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### Abstract

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This article proposes revisions to control balance theory to address a logical flaw, mistaken categorization, and inconsistencies and conceptual ambiguity in the original formulation, and it attempts to accommodate empirical findings that challenge some of its premises. The reformulated theory addresses three forms of behavior—conformity, deviance and submission—and introduces the concept of ‘control balance desirability’ to help resolve some issues in the original formulation.

### Key Words

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control balance • theory • theory development

### Introduction

Control balance theory (Tittle, 1995) is now nine years old. While it is not popular, it has (1) attracted critical attention (Braithwaite, 1997; Jensen, 1999; Savelsberg, 1999; Piquero and Hickman, 2002; Curry and Piquero, 2003), (2) it is included in repertoires of contemporary theory (examples: Vold et al., 1998: 304–8; Akers, 2000: 250–1; Crutchfield et al., 2000: 408–21; Paternoster and Bachman, 2001: 315–34), (3) it is discussed in popular textbooks (examples: Brown et al., 2001: 420–2; Schmallegger, 2002: 236; Siegel, 2003: 290–1), (4) it has been featured in sessions at professional meetings (examples: American Sociological Association, 1998; American Society of Criminology, 2000) and it has been subjected to some

empirical testing and application (Wood and Dunaway, 1997–8; Dunaway et al., 1999; Piquero and Hickman, 1999; Wood, 1999; Hickman and Piquero, 2001; Hickman et al., 2001; Piquero et al., 2001; Curry and Piquero, 2003; Piquero and Hickman, 2003).

### **Need for revision**

Theories about control have resonated well with the community of scholars during the past 50 years (Hirschi, 1969; Zimring and Hawkins, 1973; Gibbs, 1975; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Heimer and Matsueda, 1994), presumably because most recognize the potential power that freedom to commit criminal/deviant acts has in determining the likelihood that those acts will occur. Because control balance theory also plays on the autonomy theme (Gibbs, 1989), it too seems to have struck a responsive chord. Moreover, control balance theory is somewhat unique among control theories (1) in recognizing, explaining, and taking into account motivation for misbehavior, (2) in offering an account of how control is implicated in producing particular modes of deviant conduct and (3) in providing accounts, based on the same causal mechanisms, of elite as well as non-elite misbehavior. Most other control theories take criminal/deviant motivation for granted and permit predictions of misbehavior in general, not particular forms of misbehavior. Moreover, few other theories, whether control based or not, even account for high-level deviance much less portray high-level and low-level deviance as stemming from the same causal processes. Thus, on theoretical grounds the theory seems worth continued attention. Moreover, some encouraging empirical support for some aspects of the theory has accumulated (Wood and Dunaway, 1997–8; Piquero and Hickman, 1999; Hickman et al., 2001; Curry and Piquero, 2003). However, research has also produced some contrary evidence and has uncovered a potential flaw in the argument, while logical criticism has pinpointed conceptual inconsistencies (Braithwaite, 1997; Jensen, 1999; Savelsberg, 1999).

Because of the potential virtues of the theory, refinement/modification would seem to be in order. In addition, knowledge probably accumulates most efficiently when theoretical deficiencies are periodically recognized and addressed without necessarily waiting for large bodies of empirical evidence to accumulate. Therefore, I am here attempting to correct some of the problems that have made control balance theory difficult to understand and test and which may have led to weakened empirical results.

### **The original formulation**

The paradigm of theory construction illustrated by control balance theory calls for identification of an abstract central process through which various causal influences, most of which are already identified in extant theories,

are filtered. Control balance theory tries to explain behaviors or categories of behaviors, mainly but not entirely, by individuals that the majority of a given group regards as unacceptable (disapproved or having pejorative connotations) or that typically evoke collective responses of a negative type (including actions by officials who act on behalf of a group). Deviant behavior so defined is relative to group and time and it includes most but not all criminal acts. Some criminal acts are not collectively disapproved and not all criminal acts typically draw negative responses from officials.

The central causal process of the theory is a cognitive 'balancing' of the gain in *control* to be achieved from engaging in deviant behavior against the potential counter control that a particular act of deviance is likely to stimulate (representing a form of control loss) (cf. Heider, 1946, 1958). Control means the ability of an individual or other kind of social entity to manipulate or block social or other actions and circumstances. The theory assumes that all people can be characterized globally and situationally by 'control ratios', which represent the total amount of control they can exercise, relative to the control to which they are subject. As used in the theory, control is a broad concept involving social, structural and other kinds of influences. Following Sullivan (1953), the theory also assumes that every person has a latent readiness or desire to gain more control (Braithwaite, 1997) but that such readiness is most likely to rise to consciousness among people with control imbalances, either deficiencies or surpluses. Moreover, the theory contends that deviant behavior is the main method conceived by people attempting to extend their control, once their desire for more control becomes conscious and acute. Whether individuals, or other social entities, act on that desire is theorized to depend on several conditions that make it more or less likely that deviance will result in a net gain in control. Therefore, deviant behavior occurs when a number of variables/conditions come together and/or interact.

The first is for a person (or other social entity) to possess a control imbalance. Those with control balances are theorized to conform most of the time. Conformity results because the balance of control means that almost any form of deviance to extend control can be countered by control to nullify that potential gain. Moreover, those with control balances are less likely to encounter situations that activate deviant motivation. The second condition for deviance is a provocation that brings a control imbalance to the person's attention in an intense way. The theory assumes that people do not constantly think about their control circumstances but instead become aware of them only episodically. The occasions for recalling a control imbalance involve situational stimulations, particularly circumstances or events that generate feelings of debasement or humiliation. When (or if) a person realizes that deviant behavior can help overcome a control imbalance or the feelings of humiliation produced by a situational provocation, he or she has become 'motivated' toward deviance. However, motivation alone will not lead to deviant conduct. Deviance must be physically possible for the person at the time and actual probability and

magnitude of counter controlling responses must not be so great as to make the gain in control stemming from potential deviant behavior too costly, measured in terms of loss of control deriving from consequences of the deviant act the person might commit.

Since opportunities for some forms of deviance are almost always present and the likely chances and magnitude of counter control are highly variable, linked to control ratios, situational conditions, and the nature of particular deviant acts, a social entity will balance the type of deviance with the likely counter control. As a result, given motivation, the chances of *some* form of deviance are high, and the stronger the motivation, the greater the chances of deviance of some sort. The particular form of deviance likely to occur, however, is theorized to be a product of specific kinds of control balancing. Because some forms of deviance (usually the more serious forms) have the most appeal as a way for extending one's control, a motivated person will contemplate committing one or more of them. However, serious forms of deviance also imply the largest potential counter control and often the greatest possibility for activating such counter control. Therefore, only those people with small control deficits or actual control surpluses can realistically resort to the most serious forms of deviance in response to motivation stimulated by situational provocation. And, of course, actual situational constraints (risk of getting caught and probability that the potential counter controls implied by the seriousness of the act will actually be activated) also come into play. Hence, each person (or social entity, such as an organization) will cognitively slide up or down a continuum of seriousness in search of an appropriate form of deviance. 'Appropriate' forms of deviance are those that are both feasible (there is an opportunity to do them and situational constraints are not too large) and perceived as potentially helpful in dealing with the original control imbalance and/or the feelings of debasement about that imbalance that the provoking event or circumstance stimulates.

As specified in the original statement (Tittle, 1995), people with control surpluses (those who can typically exercise more control than that to which they are subject) are regarded as qualitatively different from those with control deficits (those who can typically exercise less control than that to which they are subject) and the typical kind of deviance expected of each is postulated to be different. Deviantly motivated individuals with control surpluses are portrayed as choosing mainly from different forms of 'autonomous' deviance that differ with respect to their seriousness. The most serious forms of deviance are expected to be chosen only by those with the greatest control surpluses while the least serious autonomous forms of deviance are likely by those with small to modest control surpluses. Those with control deficits who become motivated toward deviance are portrayed as choosing mainly from various forms of 'repressive' misbehaviors that differ among themselves with respect to their seriousness. Those with the lowest deficits are theorized to choose the most serious forms of repressive

deviance while those with the greatest deficits are expected to employ the least serious repressive forms of deviance.

Though not explicitly enough stated in *Control Balance* (Tittle, 1995), 'autonomous' deviance is implicitly differentiated from 'repressive' deviance partly by its indirectness. Autonomous deviance does not require direct confrontation with victims or other objects of deviant action nor does it require that perpetrators openly associate with the actions or behaviors. Instead, autonomous deviance typically makes use of third parties, organizations, or structural arrangements to commit the unacceptable acts or activities. Examples include exploitation, plunder, and decadence, which are presumably differentiated among themselves by their seriousness. The seriousness of autonomous forms of deviance, though not explicitly stated in the original formulation of control balance theory, depends on the magnitude of its consequences for others, the environment, or society as a whole as well as on the number of people and things affected by the deviant acts or action processes in question and/or on their outrageousness (to the other members of the group). 'Repressive' deviance, however, involves directly confrontational actions that are openly associated with the person doing them. Examples include predation, defiance, and submission, which are also differentiated among themselves by seriousness. Seriousness of repressive acts depends on the degree of their harmful consequences and on the extent to which they require assertiveness or aggressiveness by the person or entity doing them.

### A logical flaw

The contention that those with control deficits are liable mainly for 'repressive' deviance while those with control surpluses are liable mainly for 'autonomous' deviance is hard to apply empirically. Moreover, the theory does not explain why those with control surpluses sometimes engage in repressive deviance while those with control deficits sometimes resort to autonomous deviance. One problem with the distinction between autonomous and repressive deviance is the difficulty of establishing which forms of deviance are 'autonomous' and which ones are 'repressive' (see Braithwaite, 1997). Even if the criteria noted earlier (direct confrontation with victims or objects of deviance and open association of the perpetrator with the actions) had been set forth more explicitly in the original statement, they cannot be unequivocally applied in all instances.

In addition, the assumption that within themselves, both the repressive and autonomous continua of deviance express increasing degrees of seriousness is questionable, particularly if the focus is on the categories of deviance that are used as illustrations. For instance, some acts of predation, which represent the upper zone of the 'repressive' continuum, are probably less serious in an absolute sense than are 'defiant' acts in the middle of the 'repressive' continuum. A mother using guilt to induce a child to do

something for her benefit (a form of predation mentioned in *Control Balance*) is probably not committing as serious an act of deviance as would be a disgruntled worker who sabotaged a machine (an act that would fit the definition of defiance set forth in *Control Balance*) or a youth vandalizing a school building. And some illustrated acts of decadence, such as sexual debauchery, may not be as serious as some acts of plunder, such as massive contamination of the air in pursuit of corporate profits, even though decadence is portrayed in the theory as the most extreme form of 'autonomous' deviance.

Further, the 'repressive' and the 'autonomous' continua of deviance, which in the original statement of the theory were assumed to run on separate, offset tracks, appear to overlap, especially in seriousness. For example, contrary to the premises of the theory, some types of exploitation, such as enlisting a friend to harass a rival (use of third parties), do not seem to require any more of a control surplus than do some forms of predation, such as threatening a rival directly. Moreover, some acts in the upper zone of the 'repressive' continuum (predation) that are presumably more likely for people with control deficits are probably more serious than some of the 'autonomous' deviant acts (those presumably more likely for people with control surpluses).

Consequently, there is no necessary reason within the logic of the theory why a person with a control surplus would choose mainly from among 'autonomous' deviant acts (described categorically as exploitation, plunder, and decadence). Indeed, some 'repressive' acts of deviance (described categorically as predation, defiance, and submission) may be more appropriate to the level of control surplus operating in a given instance than are some of the 'autonomous' misbehaviors. Similarly, persons with a control deficit who become motivated toward deviance sometimes may be able to commit 'autonomous' deviant acts and may in fact choose them over 'repressive' forms. Hence, the continuum of seriousness probably does not break nicely in the middle of the control ratio continuum, nor does it seem to run on parallel off set tracks as the original formulation implied. In fact, it may be that, as Braithwaite (1997) suggests and some research (Piquero and Hickman, 1999; Curry and Piquero, 2003) has shown, control imbalances, whether surpluses or deficits, may predict all forms of deviant outcome without much differentiation by whether they are 'autonomous' or 'repressive' in nature.

## Conceptual inconsistencies

### *Categories vs continua*

Not only did the original formulation introduce ambiguity in identifying separate continua of deviance, but some confusing statements, particularly about seriousness, created unnecessary frustration for readers (see Curry and Piquero, 2003). In attempting to make the argument more palatable,

qualitative distinctions between zones within both the 'repressive' and the 'autonomous' continua were identified and described. For example, the logic of the causal argument specifies that those with relatively small control deficits will resort mainly to the most serious forms of 'repressive' deviance, whatever they might actually be. Those acts have great potential payoff in altering a control imbalance and those with small deficits can reasonably expect to avoid counter controlling consequences. But, lacking actual data about seriousness, *Control Balance* describes acts of predation as if they were actually the most serious forms of 'repressive' deviance even though they were merely *assumed* to be so (see Tittle, 1999). Illustrative acts within that zone were identified as 'theft, rape, homicide, robbery, assault, fraud, price gouging by individual entrepreneurs, coercive pimping, and sexual harassment, as well as acts like parental use of guilt to elicit child attention' (Tittle, 1995: 137), again based on speculation, not actual data, about seriousness. The predation zone is, in turn, qualitatively differentiated from the middle third of the 'repressive continuum', which encompasses acts of defiance. Defiance is defined as those acts 'in which the individual perpetrator expresses contempt for, or hostility toward, a norm, a set of norms, or to the individual, group, or organization with which that norm is associated' (1995: 138). Such acts were said to lack obvious benefit to the deviant actor and were illustrated by youthful violation of curfews and status restrictions, vandalism, mocking denigrations of company officials by striking workers, sullenness by a marital partner, exaggerated obedience by employees or students, and raucous political protests (Tittle, 1995: 138). And, the lower third of the 'repressive' continuum is described as encompassing submissive behaviors. In a similar way, 'autonomous' acts are differentiated qualitatively into three zones, with accompanying descriptions and illustrations.

It now appears that those qualitative descriptions have little value. Not only are they based on unfounded speculation but they do not necessarily stem from the premises of the theory and, as differentiated, the categories are not logically consistent (Braithwaite, 1997; Jensen, 1999; see also Tittle, 1997). Logical aberration is most obvious in the case of what is described as the least serious 'repressive' deviance, that of submission. Described as 'passive, unthinking, slavish obedience to the expectations, commands, or anticipated desires of others' (Tittle, 1995: 139–40), with examples given of eating slop on command, helping repress others to please power holders, allowing oneself to be physically abused, humiliated, or sexually degraded; or simply conforming to routinized patterns of life without contemplating or questioning whether there is an alternative, submission is theoretically most likely among those with very large control deficits. But, submission (or for that matter any of the other forms of deviance used as examples) is not necessarily deviant, according to the definition used in *Control Balance*, and to the extent that deviance is, as portrayed in the theory, used as a means of changing a control imbalance, submission would not logically follow from control balancing (Braithwaite,

1997). Indeed, submission is theorized to occur because persons or entities are so overwhelmed with control limitations that they lose the ability to imagine any alternatives to submission, not when they balance control with counter control and end up choosing submission.

### *Confused meaning of seriousness*

In the original formulation of control balance theory, the seriousness of a potential deviant act is exceptionally important because it figures in calculations of the potential counter control that might be provoked by committing that behavior. However, statements about seriousness are unclear, making it difficult for a consumer of the theory to distinguish among seriousness, deviantness, and constraint. The following, almost contradictory statements appear at various places in the book: 'seriousness is the degree to which a deviant act will *actually* activate . . . [counter control]' (1995: 136, emphasis in original); 'the likelihood that a particular deviant act will activate restraining responses by others, which is called *constraint*' (1995: 142, emphasis in original); '(the more serious the act), the greater the chances that controlling responses will be activated' (1995: 180); "*constraint*" refers to the probability, or perceived probability, that potential control will *actually* be exercised' (1995: 167, emphases in original); 'the seriousness of a deviant act, then, is distinct from its deviantness, which rests on majority ideas about rightness and wrongness or on *possible* activation of social reactions' (1995: 136, emphasis in original); and 'seriousness of the deviant act (implying the amount of counter control that potentially can be activated) . . .' (1995: 222). Given such statements, it is not surprising that some scholars are baffled in trying to understand control balance theory.

Moreover, seriousness of deviance does not logically have the importance that is implied by many of the statements in *Control Balance*. From the original formulation of the theory, one might gain the impression that the part of the theory explaining why an individual commits one type of deviance rather than another hinges on the relative seriousness of the possible acts. Whether a person resorts to one form of deviance over another is at times portrayed as the outcome of the balancing of control to be gained from a particular action against the seriousness of the act, although at other times the hinge variable is said to be constraint. In fact, ideas about seriousness are often presented as if seriousness were completely synonymous with constraint, implying actual chances of counter control. However, seriousness and constraint were intended to be separate concepts, although constraint was visualized as a composite variable combining the seriousness of an act (a more or less fixed quality) with the situational risk of that act (a quality that varies from context to context and from time to time).

## Refinements

Clearly, then, the theory needs more than episodic clarification and piecemeal modification (see Tittle, 1997, 1999). It requires systematic, coherent revision to correct its main logical flaw, to dispense with categorical, qualitative distinctions in types of deviance, and to pose a clear, consistent conceptualization for seriousness. Critics may think the theory needs other revisions as well, but these three stand out. Of the three issues, the most important is the presumed differentiation of 'repressive' from 'autonomous' forms of deviance. However, before refinements concerning the differences in 'autonomous' and 'repressive' deviance can be understood, it is necessary to clarify the usage of the concept of *seriousness* and to emphasize that types of deviance cannot be classified meaningfully into the specific categories of seriousness laid out in the original work.

### *Meaning of seriousness*

In this reformulation, the seriousness of a deviant act is the potential it holds for large or powerful counter control; that is, the concept implies the *amount* of control *inherent in the act* in a specific social group that *could possibly be* forthcoming. For instance, in contemporary America, murder, no matter who does it, *can* activate much deliberate counter control from legal officials and from friends and associates of the victim. It *can* also alter a perpetrator's environment so that he/she ends up with a loss of some control. For instance, an occupationally unskilled woman who murders her husband may lose a source of financial support. Even if she escapes legal sanctions and loses no friends, the absence of her husband's financial contribution to the family might nevertheless reduce her subsequent ability to control things in her life. Seriousness, therefore, is a feature of deviant acts implying their potential for arousing counter control; it is not simply a collective cognitive judgment about the 'wrongness' of particular acts or the damage they might cause, such as might be obtained from existing surveys of offense seriousness (examples: Rossi et al., 1974; Cullen et al., 1982).

Though seriousness as used in the theory can presumably be measured, such measurement is probably not easy to accomplish because seriousness has both objective and subjective aspects. Though the theory conceives of seriousness as a quality inherent to a deviant act, it is clear that perceptions of that quality depend at least partly on the perceiver rather than on concrete features of the act itself. But for practical purposes in applying the theory, subjective aspects of seriousness are probably more important than are objective aspects. Therefore, survey questions about the general perceived 'severity' of legal reactions for various deviant acts may help in measurement (see Curry and Piquero, 2003). However, using indicators of perceived severity of possible legal sanctions probably does not permit fully adequate measurement of seriousness. Accurate measurement also requires

indicators of how particular deviant acts might affect interpersonal relationships, future opportunities, such as chances for professional training or getting bank loans, structural arrangements in which the person is or might become embedded, such as the general availability of employment or marriage opportunities, and other things, such as loss of transportation or access to medical care, that might control what a person can do.

Seriousness, per se, however, is not the key to control balancing. Seriousness, as clarified earlier, is important in conjunction with situational risk. Situational risk involves concrete, actual chances of getting caught and punished as well as actual chances that the deviant act will activate changes in the social structure or the physical environment that will result in greater control on the actor. However, as with seriousness, there is a perceptual side to situational risk that is probably more important than the objective side. Therefore, traditional measures of perceived certainty of legal sanctions or of certainty of informal sanctions are likely to be helpful in tests (Curry and Piquero, 2003) but accurate measurement also requires some attention to the perceived likelihood of other kinds of counter control. More importantly, both seriousness (potential magnitude of counter control) and situational risk (the actual chances of controlling consequences being brought about) are constituent parts of the composite variable of *constraint*. It is constraint, the composite variable, that an actor cognitively balances against the potential gain in control to be achieved by a deviant act.

### *Categories vs continua*

In the proposed refinement, categories of deviance become irrelevant. Distinctions among 'repressive' and 'autonomous' types of deviance and among zones of the continua supposedly making up those types are abandoned. For example, predation as distinct from exploitation or defiance, or even plunder, has no meaning. In fact, only two of the previous sub-categories of behavior are retained—submission and conformity. The revised theory attempts to explain submission as a distinct form of behavior. It treats submission as something different from conformity, although submission may not necessarily be deviant behavior. Even though submission is deviant in some social groups, its explanation in the reformulated control balance theory, unlike clearly deviant acts in those same social groups, is not linked to its degree of social unacceptability (see Tittle, 1997). The theory as refined, then, attempts to explain conformity and deviance as products of control balancing and it attempts to explain submission as a failure of control balancing—a capitulation, as suggested by Braithwaite (1997).

### *The main argument*

In this revision, control balancing to arrive at a particular form of deviant behavior to be committed in an effort to extend one's control is no longer

theorized to be oriented around two separate continua of 'repressive' and 'autonomous' deviance. Instead, control balancing is seen as focusing on a single continuum of deviance with points on that continuum differentiated with respect to what will be called their *control balance desirability*. By definition, *control balance desirability* will refer to a quality possessed in different degrees by various potential deviant acts. In empirical terms, it is a composite variable composed of two indicators: (1) the likely long-range effectiveness of the deviant act in question for altering a control imbalance; and (2) the extent to which a given form of misbehavior requires the perpetrator to be directly and personally involved with a victim or an object that is affected by the deviance.

Deviance that is greatest in *control balance desirability* has maximum potential long-range impact in altering control imbalances, and it is most impersonal (that is, it can be done without direct, hands-on action by the individual practicing it). Long-range gain in control is important because individuals are assumed to have an inherent need or desire to control things (rooted in the dependency of infancy and childhood), which is theorized to drive much of human conduct (cf. Sullivan, 1953), particularly deviant conduct. The control to be gained by deviant behavior is control over things external to the individual and if it is impersonal, the possibility of counter control is reduced. However, impersonality also bears on control of internal psychic states such as self-esteem and self-concept. Direct, hands-on, personally involving types of deviant behavior generally have less long-range potential for modifying a control imbalance, and they are likely to produce disreputable public images. Since self-attitudes and concepts appear to be rooted in the reactions of social audiences (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980), risking a bad reputation has important implications for the person's ability to control his/her own psychic states. Hence, the end product of deviance that is highly 'control balance desirable' is a gain in external and in internal control.

In this connection, note that a reputation for deviance that is directly involving, such as interpersonal violence, robbery, vandalism, or rape are not always disreputable, and in some contexts they may even enhance a person's control, at least in the short run (see, for example, Katz, 1988; McCall, 1994). Yet, even in subcultural environments where an 'awesome' personal presence is prestigious, most people caught up in such subcultures still recognize the superiority of being able to control others through higher-level means such as by commanding a large corporation, practicing a profession, occupying a government position, or even heading a criminal syndicate (see, for example, Anderson, 1978, 1999; Cureton, 2004). Moreover, in the grand scheme of things, those who depend on bad reputations to extend their control typically do not, in fact, have or achieve much overall control nor are they able to sustain their dominant positions for long, even within subcultures where such dominance is most admired.

It should be recognized that *control balance desirability* is a theoretical construct and may not correspond at all to the 'inherent appeal' or

'attractiveness' of a given deviant act to the person contemplating such an act, nor does it necessarily encompass aspects of deviance that various other theorists and researchers have assumed make deviance alluring. Control balance theory interprets deviant behavior as a way of managing relative control, a way of altering a control imbalance. Hence, *control balance desirability* refers to aspects of deviant behavior that bear on maximization of control manipulation, which involves long-range outcomes and effective escape from counter control. It is especially important to recognize this focus because, in the heat of passion generated by provocation, people often feel an urge to do things that have low *control balance desirability*. In that sense, deviant acts may have high 'personal desirability' but low *control balance desirability*. For instance, a denigrated worker may have a powerful desire to assault a boss on the spot (the act is personally appealing to him at the moment), but assaulting somebody has low *control balance desirability* because it likely produces little long-range favorable alteration in a control imbalance and it requires great personal involvement.

Long-range effectiveness and impersonality of various deviant acts potentially can be estimated from empirical data and combined into a scale. Scores on that scale would then permit all of the deviant acts at issue to be arrayed on a continuum from minimum *control balance desirability* to maximum *control balance desirability*. The closer to one or another end of the overall continuum a given form of deviance falls, the more distinct and differentiated it is from most other forms of deviance, particularly those at the opposite end of the continuum. Thus, pouting by a husband who feels denigrated by his wife would probably be at the lower end of the *control balance desirability* continuum because it is not likely to be very effective in the long run in changing a control ratio and it is a very personal, direct, open expression, identifying the individual as a pouter. Such misbehavior is widely separated on the *control balance desirability* continuum from something like massive underpricing of a company's product to drive a competitor out of business because a corporate executive felt denigrated by remarks from the competitor CEO. Such 'anti-competitive' activities would likely score high on the *control balance desirability* scale. If undertaken successfully, they could substantially enhance that executive's long-range personal control ratio as well as that of the company he/she heads. Moreover, such tactics are indirect, impersonal, and not openly attributable to the executive per se. The head of a corporation does not personally have to confront anybody outside the organization nor does he/she have to be identified as a ruthless person; indeed, if necessary he/she can usually successfully deny personal responsibility and attribute it to underlings or to normal, incremental, collective decision making to maximize marketing of the product.

Although pouting and anti-competitive marketing are probably quite different in *control balance desirability*, other deviant acts may be located near the middle of the continuum where they overlap, being hardly

distinguishable from each other by their scale scores. Similar mid-range *control balance desirability* scores might result from alternative combinations of the two criteria (potential effectiveness and impersonality). A particular deviant act might have high potential long-range effectiveness in altering a control imbalance but also involve a lot of personal involvement, which mutes the high desirability implied by long-range effectiveness. These opposite characteristics might mean that some deviant acts are midway on the continuum of *control balance desirability*. For instance, an abused wife might kill her abusive husband. This act could potentially enhance her control ratio considerably, and with long-lasting effects. At the same time, however, it is personal and direct so that she can be publicly identified as a killer. The two possibilities may cancel each other somewhat, resulting in a medium-level score.

Another deviant act might fall near the middle of the continuum of *control balance desirability* because the act implies modest amounts of long-range effectiveness and also modest amounts of impersonality. For example, a small business owner might hire somebody to publicly post derogatory statements, presumably from a disgruntled customer, about a competitor. This act could reduce the competitor's business and enhance the deviant's (implying change in his/her control ratio) if it is well crafted and believable, but it is unlikely to dramatically change things or have long-range effects. At the same time, however, it is to some extent impersonal and indirect, making it more 'control balance desirable' than, say, attacking the rival in public.

And still other deviant acts might fall near the middle of the continuum because they are low in potential effectiveness but at the same time also low in personal involvement. Thus, a peeved customer might anonymously write a hot letter of complaint to a company president. Because the letter is anonymous and rude, it probably will not be taken seriously, so its long-range effectiveness is low even though it may temporarily make the writer feel he/she has more control for having insulted the company president. However, the action is also impersonal and indirect, so the net score on *control balance desirability* would probably be medium.

The modified version of control balance theory being presented attempts to explain why individuals or social entities who become motivated toward misbehavior choose forms of deviance located **within various ranges** of a continuum of *control balance desirability*. The theory does not purport to allow accurate predictions of a specific act such as the probability that a given individual will commit assault (or some other specific act). However, it does claim to explain the selection of a specific deviant act from among those with **similar control balance desirability scores**. Appropriate tests of the part of the theory concerning commission of types of deviance will require, first, estimation of the *control balance desirability* of several deviant acts that investigators might wish to examine. Ideally, researchers will include possible deviant acts spread over a *control balance desirability* continuum. The theory then stipulates that using its variables will permit

prediction of the commission of one or more of a possible set of several deviant acts within specified ranges of *control balance desirability*.

For example, imagine that a researcher estimates or establishes the *control balance desirability* of, say, 30 different deviant acts. Imagine further, that those scores are evenly distributed over a continuum from high to low, with the continuum divided into sixths. Within each sixth, five deviant acts are distributed from high to low. The theory suggests that the control ratio will predict commission of one or more of the acts, but not a specific one, within a corresponding zone of that continuum (in this example, perhaps within a range covered by two of the sixths). It further suggests that considering the control ratio in conjunction with additional variables from the theory will enable prediction of one or more acts within a more restricted zone (for example, perhaps within a range covered by one of the sixths).

The theory only predicts acts within ranges of *control balance desirability* although it contends that prediction within narrower ranges can be achieved by taking into account greater numbers of variables specified by the theory. However, it must be emphasized that achieving really precise predictions of particular, specific deviant acts, such as the likelihood of an individual to smoke marijuana or cheat in a classroom exam, when the research does not permit identification of possible alternative acts with similar *control balance desirability*, is unlikely.

Inability to achieve total accuracy stems in part from the pliability of *control balance desirability*. While such a quality is theoretically fixed, characterizing various acts in different degrees, in reality it cannot be completely fixed. Instead, *control balance desirability* will inevitably vary somewhat with the characteristics of a person or entity contemplating a particular deviant act and with the situation. For instance, in the earlier described case of an abusive husband being killed by his victim, killing may enhance the control of one woman who escapes an oppressive lifestyle but at the same time actually reduce the overall control of another woman who previously had been able to use her husband's general prestige to open doors for herself. Moreover, even if there were fixed consequences for any person's future control ratio associated with every potential deviant act, perceptions of those potential consequences would vary somewhat from person to person and perhaps from situation to situation.

Nevertheless, one can imagine that there is a 'general' or 'average' degree of *control balance desirability* associated with any given type of deviant act. Therefore, it should be possible to array various potential deviant acts on a general continuum from highly 'control balance desirable' to those with little *control balance desirability*. At the very least, one could assign such scores based on average perceptions by surveyed individuals, and then determine the ability of control balance variables to predict each individual's projected or self-reported choice of committing acts within given ranges of that derived *control balance desirability* continuum. Specifically, survey respondents might be asked initially to rate each of a number of

possible deviant acts with respect to their potential for increasing a person's control (defined, as the theory specifies) and with respect to their degree of impersonality (defined as involving indirect actions that avoid open identification of the perpetrator). The ratings could then be combined using standard scaling procedures, permitting the list of deviant acts to be arrayed from high desirability to low. Hypotheses could then be tested using control balance variables (to be identified shortly) to predict deviant behavior of one type or another within the ranges of the continuum specified by the hypotheses. Or alternatively, individuals' own perceptions of *control balance desirability* could be used to array deviant acts on a *control balance desirability* continuum for that specific person. Then, other control balance variables (control ratio, opportunity, etc.) could be used to predict those respondents' projected likelihood of engaging in the acts within similar zones of their *control balance desirability* continua (or their reports of having done so in the past).

The claim of this refined control balance theory to predict outcomes within ranges of a continuum encompassing acts with similar *control balance desirability* might at first blush appear to contradict the empirically established notion that those who commit one type of deviant act are also likely to commit others, with little specialization in offending patterns (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 213–14). In fact, however, the reformulated argument is fully consistent with the 'generality' principle of deviant behavior because acts that have similar *control balance desirability* scores may in other respects be quite different. For instance, if the *control balance desirability* of child neglect were empirically measured, it might score fairly low because child neglect is not likely to alter the neglectful parent's control ratio very much or for very long and it requires personal and publicly noticeable involvement between the perpetrator and the victim. But, the same would also probably be true of excessive alcohol use (the victim is one's self), gang fighting, writing hot checks, and assaulting a co-worker. Even though these five acts may have fairly similar *control balance desirability* scores (falling within a restricted range on an overall continuum), many scholars would regard them as very different types of misbehavior. They include acts of violence (gang fighting and assaulting a co-worker), an act of fraud (writing hot checks), an act of self-destruction (excessive alcohol use) and an act of social negligence or indifference (child neglect). If particular control balance variables predict the likelihood of one or another of the acts within the set (although not a particular exclusive act) during a particular time or space limitation, that outcome would, in fact, be consistent with, and confirm, the notion of the generality of deviance, as it is usually understood. In this connection, it is important to remember that at a given point in time and space, the similarity of potential offenses from which a deviantly motivated person is likely to choose consists of similarity in *control balance desirability*, which may not reflect other forms of likeness. Indeed, similarity in *control balance desirability* can easily be consistent with great dissimilarity in other respects.

Moreover, the variables in the theory (to be detailed shortly) are dynamic, often exhibiting different values at different stages of the life cycle, in different circumstances and in different situations. Because none of the main causal variables (not even self-control, despite Hirschi and Gottfredson's assumption) is theorized to have a fixed value for a person or social entity, all actors may, over a long period of time, find themselves at different times choosing from deviant acts that fall within different ranges of a *control balance desirability* continuum. Thus, it is likely that in addition to the potential offense differentiation of deviant acts within given zones of a *control balance desirability* continuum in circumscribed times and places, individuals may, over a longer period of time and across many spatial domains, exhibit considerable differentiation with respect to the areas or zones of a *control balance desirability* continuum within which they choose their deviant acts. For instance, a person's choices of deviant acts (from a set of such acts with similar *control balance desirability*) may be at the lower end of the desirability continuum while they are adolescents but move to the upper end when they become adults and finally to the middle when they become aged. Such variation would be consistent with the generality principle.

#### *Effects of the main variables on choice of control balance desirability range from which deviant acts are selected*

With a *control balance desirability* continuum differentiated, either in a general sense or in an individual perceptual sense, the question then is: What determines the *control balance desirability* range of likely deviance for a person (or entity) that becomes motivated to alter a control imbalance? In other words, what affects the control balancing process? Theoretically, four main variables influence the desirability range from which a deviant act will be chosen, once motivation toward deviance has occurred (a provocation has produced a realization that deviance can favorably alter the control imbalance). They are: (1) the person's (or social entity's) control ratio; (2) opportunity; (3) constraint; and (4) the person's self-control (or if concerned with a social entity other than an individual person, such as a business organization, the extent to which internal structural arrangements constrain impulsive action by decision makers).

#### *Control ratio*

One's control ratio is relevant to the range of *control balance desirability* from which a deviant act will be selected because only those with surpluses or low deficits can realistically contemplate acts that may generate great counter control. Such acts are, for the most part, also the acts that are most effective for altering a control imbalance. For example, putting a competitor out of business through false advertising could substantially extend a commercial trader's control within the business domain. However, because it has great consequences for the competitor, other potential com-

petitors, and the community of consumers, it is likely to lead to great resistance and therefore imply much potential effort at counter control. Therefore, only those business practitioners with large surplus controls can realistically imagine themselves resorting to false advertising against an opponent. Business practitioners with control deficits or only small surpluses must resort to other deviant acts that are not too likely to generate counter controlling responses. For the most part those alternatives will involve deviant acts with lower *control balance desirability*. For instance, business people with fewer control advantages may overcharge customers by small amounts on each transaction. Such overcharging is unlikely to be discovered and if discovered unlikely to result in costly consequences because in any given instance intentional misbehavior can be denied and recompense made. However, the gain in control this business will achieve through such a practice is minimal, and overcharging can lead to a bad reputation with ultimate consequences for that business's control ratio.

A control imbalance, either a deficit or a surplus, stands at the beginning of the causal chain that ultimately results in deviant behavior. Initially, the most relevant aspect of a control ratio is simply the fact of imbalance. In the beginning, surpluses and deficits have the same practical consequences—they help to predispose a person or social entity to become motivated for deviance. However, the magnitude of a control imbalance is also important because motivation for deviance stems from provocation that reminds the person or social entity of his/her/its control circumstances. The greater the imbalance, the greater the chances that when provocative situations are encountered, humiliation will be engendered.

Those with deficits are provoked by realizing that they do not have enough control to manage life circumstances or to avoid humiliation while those with surpluses are provoked by recognition that the control they have become accustomed to exercising or expect to exercise is not sufficiently acknowledged. Different amounts of exposure to circumstances potentially leading to humiliation or debasement and different actual levels of humiliation or debasement are obviously important influences on motivation, but they work hand in hand with the control ratio. One's gross control ratio sets the parameters within which those other influences operate. Further along the sequential chain, where choices to commit specific deviant acts are made, the exact degree of control imbalance (the control ratio), becomes more critical. There, whether an imbalance is large or small and whether it is in the deficit or the surplus direction, is crucial. And, as will be seen later, the control ratio intersects and interacts with other variables, particularly constraint, to influence the range of *control balance desirability* from which a deviant act is chosen.

The control ratio theoretically extends from a maximum deficit to a maximum surplus, the middle zone being balanced with an approximately equal degree of control to be exercised relative to that experienced. However, in this reformulation of the theory, the balanced middle zone of the control ratio is not to be included when predicting the range of a

*control balance desirability* continuum from which a given person or entity will select a deviant act, nor is that part of the control ratio continuum representing overwhelming control deficits. In effect, tests of the theory should be in four parts. Part one, concerning submission, might use a full continuum of control ratios, but the dependent variable will be a dichotomy—either submission or not. One would expect that higher control ratios predict lower chances of submission. Part two, concerning conformity, would possibly use a dichotomous representation of the control ratio—a balance or an imbalance—and a dichotomous representation of the dependent variable—either conformity or not, making sure to differentiate conformity from submission. Part three, concerning the expectation that control imbalances will be associated with some form of deviant behavior, should probably employ a dichotomous independent variable, either balance or imbalance, excluding the ‘overwhelming’ end of the continuum and the balanced zone. The hypothesis would be that an imbalance, given motivation, would be associated with the performance of one or more of a set of possible deviant acts. Part four, involving specific deviant acts within ranges of the *control balance desirability* continuum, should use the full range of control ratio scores, excluding overwhelming control deficits and balanced control ratios, with the dependent variable being the probability of deviant acts within specified ranges of *control balance desirability*.

The challenge in such tests is to identify ‘overwhelming’ control deficits as well as ‘balanced’ control ratios. Initially this might involve considerable trial and error. For example, if submission were measured, a researcher might then investigate the relationship between measures of control ratios and those measures of submission. Assuming that the predicted negative relationship materializes and that most instances of submission are performed by those at the lower end of the control ratio continuum, the researcher might graph the results to identify the cutoff point at which there is no longer a significant chance of submission occurring. Below that could be the zone of ‘overwhelming’ deficits for purposes of tests of the other parts of the theory. Similarly, measures of control ratios that are ‘balanced’ or near ‘one’, perhaps with a band of plus or minus 10 percent (initially an arbitrary cutoff), should correspond with conformity while other scores do not. Assuming that such results are forthcoming, one could then graph the scores to identify the actual band outside of which there is no longer a significant chance of conformity. That zone could be designated as ‘balanced’ in tests of the other parts of the theory.

### *Opportunity*

Opportunity for specific types of deviant action is crucial for control balancing because deviant acts cannot occur unless they are possible. A potential perpetrator of deviance must have access and means to commit the actions that are being contemplated (or in research, being predicted).

Personally assaulting a challenger not only requires arm movement and strength; it also requires physical convergence of the assaulter and the victim in time and space and in circumstances where others cannot or will not restrain the attack and where physical barriers do not get in the way (for example, one cannot punch a victim in a passing automobile). Clearly, the means to every form of deviance are not available to all people or social entities, nor is it possible to employ such means, even if available, in all circumstances. Physical confrontation is simply not always possible, personal manipulation sometimes cannot happen, and most people are not in a position to employ third parties or abstract entities (such as social structural arrangements) in accomplishing deviance. Hence, opportunities may affect what people can do and thereby what will likely occur.

Indeed, opportunity for deviance is one of the key factors that help determine which deviant act within a range of *control balance desirability* is selected for commission. Consider a man with a modest control deficit, say a construction worker, reminded of his situation by a boss's direct order delivered in a harsh tone. That man will probably want to alter his control imbalance but he cannot realistically expect to do so by going back to college to become a professional engineer so that he can come back to command his old boss. It is not only extremely difficult to do, given his station in life, but it would take a very long time. Even if it could be accomplished, by the time it was achieved the temporary insult would probably be long forgotten. Therefore, this construction worker will probably contemplate deviance. Given his control ratio, he has no opportunity to buy the company and fire the boss.

It is here that control balancing comes into play. Murdering the boss is not usually realistic because of the potential counter control it is likely to invoke. But there are a number of deviant things he has the opportunity for and could realistically expect to do. Among them would be slowing down his work, sabotaging a machine, gossiping about the boss, stealing something from the project, verbally denigrating a co-worker, going home and abusing his own wife, or vandalizing a random building. All of these actions probably fall within a fairly restricted zone of *control balance desirability*, within a range that one might speculate to be, say, between about 20 to 40 on a 100-point continuum in which zero signifies the lowest possible *control balance desirability* and 100 designates the maximum.

All of the acts within that range promise immediate alteration of control but little chance of much long-range change in the worker's control deficit. And, they all are direct, personal, and possibly stigmatizing. The range of *control balance desirability* within which they might fall would also correspond with and be predictable from the individual's control ratio, which in this case we might imagine reflects a modest deficit. However, some of these actions may be very similar in *control balance desirability*. For instance, measurement might show sabotaging a machine and vandalizing a building to have quite similar scores, so predicting one or the other specifically would depend on opportunity. The deviant act (or acts) that this

worker actually commits will be strongly influenced by its (their) availability and possible achievability. For instance, sabotaging a machine may be unlikely because this worker is not assigned to operate a machine, there may be no machines in the area of his work or he may not know how to render one inoperable.

### *Constraint*

The third main variable influencing the specific deviance likely to be chosen by a motivated person is constraint. Constraint is a composite variable reflecting the seriousness of an offense (possible magnitude of counter controlling consequences) and situational risk (actual chances of experiencing those counter controlling consequences). Constraint is important because the actor theoretically weighs the potential gain from a deviant act against the loss of control it is likely to provoke. Consistent with rational choice, deterrence and social learning notions (Becker, 1968; Zimring and Hawkins, 1973; Andenaes, 1974; Gibbs, 1975; Bandura, 1977; Carroll, 1978; Tittle, 1980; Akers, 1985, 1998; Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Akers and Jensen, 2003), control balance theory assumes that almost everybody is sensitive to the potential consequences of their acts. However, control balance theory sees that sensitivity as revolving around concerns about how deviant actions might stimulate or bring about additional controls, both in the present and the future. Unlike most rational choice and deterrence arguments, control balance theory focuses on the *control* implications of deviant acts, not on concrete things like fear of pain, threats to financial resources or lost prestige and respect, although each of these 'costs' can be interpreted in terms of their implications for control.

### *The causal sequence*

The process outlined so far begins with a control imbalance, which makes people sensitive to provocation. When those provocations are encountered, the person realizes anew that his/her controls are imbalanced, and he/she may grasp the notion that deviance might alleviate the problem. If so, he/she becomes motivated toward deviance. The greater the provocation, relative to the control imbalance, the stronger the motivation, and the stronger the motivation, the greater the chances the person or entity will turn to some form of deviant behavior. This greater probability of misbehavior, however, does not imply that the person will commit a specific form of deviance. For instance, from the control ratio and provocation alone we cannot predict, say, the chances that the person will commit an assault. However, if a researcher were to measure perhaps 30 different kinds of deviance, it could be expected that the probability of committing a total of one or more of them would be predictable from the control ratio and provocation alone. Moreover, we could predict that the deviant act chosen would fall within a somewhat restricted range of *control balance desirability* that is associated roughly with the person's control ratio.

Predictions of acts of deviance within a narrower range of *control balance desirability* depend on the interconnections of the individual's actual control ratio, opportunity, and constraint. Finally, the particular choice of a specific deviant act from among acts within the appropriate *control balance desirability* range and for which there is opportunity will be influenced by additional contingencies, such as the person's moral commitments, personal tastes, or experience. Therefore, the more specific the prediction to be made, the more variables that must be taken into account. The control ratio alone (assuming motivation) should predict a fairly restricted range of *control balance desirability*, from which deviance will be selected. The control ratio, in combination with opportunity (again assuming motivation), should predict a still narrower range of *control balance desirability* within which a deviant act will be selected and those acts within that range will have somewhat similar *control balance desirability* scores. But predicting an even smaller range of *control balance desirability* from which a deviant act will be chosen requires the control ratio, opportunity, constraint, and various other contingent variables. Therefore, it is unlikely that one exclusive deviant act can be well predicted.

### *Self-control*

So far, the argument has presented control balancing as if it were a completely rational/self-controlled process. I have indicated how it works *if* the person or entity in question is self-regulated and non-impulsive; that is, that he or she has the personal *ability* to restrain his/her desire to act immediately to gratify whatever emotional desires (such as overcoming humiliation) that might arise. In reality, not everybody is rational and controlled and not all social entities are well regulated and deliberative, so the outcomes expected from the theory will vary with the self-control of the person or the deliberative/controlling features of the social entity. The greater the self-control, the greater the likelihood that the control balancing process described earlier will unfold as specified and the weaker the self-control, the less likely is the process to work as specified.

Self-control comes into play because provocation creates a desire for immediate action. When people become aware that their control is weak or when they think others do not recognize the superior control they presumably have, they experience an unpleasant emotion. They usually feel a strong urge to do something right then, and they often imagine that certain immediate actions that they might take will feel good, will be empowering, and will turn their feelings from denigration to superiority. However, actions that can be undertaken on the spot usually have a greater likelihood of direct personal involvement against a victim or object and they are less likely to produce long-range gain in control. In other words, deviance involving personal contact has less *control balance desirability* than does impersonal deviance. Therefore, those with high self-control, who are more capable of deferring the immediate urge for deviance and who can visualize

and take into account the long-range consequences of their acts (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Caspi et al., 1994), will more likely choose impersonal acts of deviance, assuming they have the appropriate control ratio and opportunity to do them. Damaging a rival's credit rating provides a greater overall gain in control than does a physical confrontation with name calling, and in addition, it has less chance of provoking counter control. Thus, those who can damage a rival's credit rating, because they have the appropriate control ratio to contemplate escaping counter control for it, opportunity is available to them, and in the situation constraint is low, and who have sufficient self-control to delay immediate urges for retaliation, will choose to avoid name calling, turning instead to behind-the-scenes action.

Because those lacking self-control do not follow the control balancing process in a normally rational way, and since even for rational actors the theory can only predict misbehavior within ranges of a *control balance desirability* continuum, it is unrealistic to contend that poorly controlled individuals are necessarily more likely to commit specific deviant acts (see Curry and Piquero, 2003). It is theoretically justifiable to hypothesize that those with control imbalances and low self-control are more likely to commit deviant acts of some kind, but the ones they are liable to commit are not necessarily those that would normally be associated with people possessing their particular control ratio.

People lacking self-control are probably more likely to be provoked into awareness of a control imbalance than are others. Consequently they are more likely to become motivated for deviance. In addition, they may easily ignore the potential gain from a deviant act, resorting to acts that actually have little advantage for their future control ratios and they are likely to ignore or underestimate potential counter control associated with the acts they contemplate. As a result, motivated people with low self-control are expected to undertake acts that are out of the *control balance desirability* range normally associated with their particular control ratio. In most cases those 'out-of-range' acts will fall lower on the *control balance desirability* continuum than would the acts otherwise expected for people or entities with their control ratios. Low self-control, however, should have no effect on the general relationship between control ratios and commission of some, unspecified, act of misbehavior in the face of motivation.

Consider an example of a man with a small surplus of control, say a small business executive, who in a grocery check-out line is jostled by another customer. Because he is used to having people accord him respect and deference, he is offended. This provocation reminds him of his control surplus, which is not being recognized. Imagine that his control ratio is about 66 on a continuum of control ratios ranging from a maximum deficit, which for purposes of illustration I will designate as a zero, to a maximum surplus, which for illustration I will designate as 100, with balanced control cases being omitted. Normally such an individual would turn to deviance that falls in the *control balance desirability* range corre-

sponding to his position on the control ratio continuum—perhaps somewhere between 50 and 75.

He might, for instance, falsely report to the police or the store manager that the individual is intoxicated and causing a disturbance. Such action would probably score modestly high on the *control balance desirability* continuum because it is at least somewhat effective in regaining the business executive's temporary control and it may have long-range advantages if calling his sensitivity to the store manager's attention leads to better customer service in the future. Moreover, the action is somewhat separated from the individual himself because it is the store manager or the police who confront the jostler. However, if this individual has weak self-control, he may act immediately to confront the offender with verbal reprimands, pushing, or worse. Those acts score fairly low on the *control balance desirability* continuum. Whether these low desirability actions gain control for the offended executive is somewhat problematic. In fact, they may well lead to a dispute, to expressions of further disrespect for the executive, or to violence in which the executive gets hurt or has to pay for hurting somebody else. In addition, impulsive confrontation is personal and direct, carrying a strong possibility that people will come to think of the executive as a 'hothead', a 'jerk', or a violent person. The point is that if self-control is not taken into account, hypotheses predicting a strong association between the control ratio and the *control balance desirability* range of deviant acts will not be supported.

### *Intersection of the four variables*

In explaining and predicting forms of deviance within restricted ranges of the *control balance desirability* continuum, one must take into account control ratios, opportunity, constraint and self-control. The most important of the four is probably the control ratio. The control ratio is expected to be associated with the *control balance desirability* of deviant acts. The control ratio sets the parameters of what might happen, opportunity influences what can happen, and constraint influences whether it will happen. Self-control comes into play only when the control ratio, opportunity, and constraint are favorable toward one or another kind of deviance. Thus, most of the time, only those with control surpluses will be likely to commit deviance that scores highly on the *control balance desirability* scale. Yet, some of those with control surpluses may lack self-control, so they end up doing one or another of the deviant acts with low *control balance desirability*, which invite strong and immediate counter control. Powerful, influential people who could easily enhance their control by hiring thugs to intimidate a romantic rival may, nevertheless, personally assault the competitor. But self-control is not determinative. For instance, those with control surpluses but weak self-control may nevertheless avoid low *control balance desirability* deviance because of situational risk. In the

previous example, even most hotheads with low self-control would probably still refrain from a personal attack if they encounter the rival in a public place with many other people around.

By contrast, the theory predicts that most of the time those with control deficits will commit deviance with low *control balance desirability*, and that the magnitude of the control ratio will correspond with the magnitude of 'desirability'. However, sometimes even those with control deficits have opportunities for high *control balance desirability* deviance and sometimes they have the self-control necessary to employ those deviant acts in lieu of the more immediate ones that typically are of the low *control balance desirability* variety. Hence, a generally powerless, non-influential woman may have a friend in high places who is prevailed upon to divert funds into her bank account in lieu of her committing a robbery. Moreover, those with control deficits may be restrained by situational risk, so they may end up using various kinds of deviance that otherwise might not be employed to overcome their control imbalances or they may be inhibited altogether by situational risk.

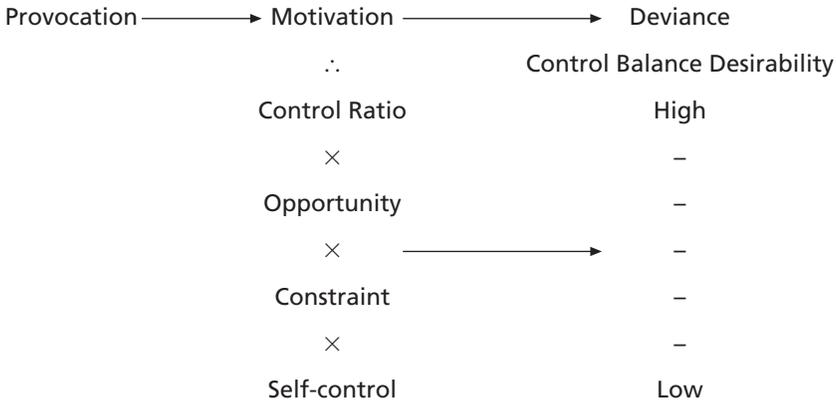
Figure 1 helps illustrate the reformulated theory. The top section of the figure shows a balanced control ratio leading directly to conformity. While control balancing is implicated in conformity, conformity is set apart from deviant behavior because it is essentially non-problematic, at least from the point of view of the theory. Those with balanced control ratios are less likely to be provoked and, if provoked, they are less likely to resort to deviance at all because the potential counter control they face balances any potential gain in control that might be produced by deviant behavior. Those with control balances are expected to turn to deviance only when they experience dramatic temporary shifts in control from balance to imbalance, or if they lack self-control and fail to weigh their situations appropriately. Similarly, the bottom of the figure shows the effect on submission of an extreme control deficit. Submission is shown outside the interior of the diagram, set apart by a solid line, because it represents a failure of control balancing; facing overwhelming and crushing control, the actor simply gives up and stops trying to balance potential gains from deviance against constraint.

The central part of Figure 1, differentiated by solid lines, depicts the deviance generating process. As described earlier, deviance starts with actors (either individual persons or social entities) whose control ratios are unbalanced. Such people (or social entities) are likely at some point, perhaps frequently, to become motivated toward deviance (indicated by the positioning of *provocation* under *imbalance* with an arrow from *provocation* to *motivation*). Motivation occurs when provoking situations remind the actors of their control imbalances, particularly if the provocations involve some form of debasement, and the actors perceive that deviant behavior could help alter that imbalance. Motivation then interacts, or intersects (indicated by the dotted triangle under *motivation*, with the *control ratio*, *opportunity*, *constraint* and *self-control* to generate a proba-

**Control Ratio**

Balanced  $\longrightarrow$  Conformity

**Imbalanced**



Overwhelming Deficit  $\longrightarrow$  Submission

**Figure 1** Illustration of control balancing process

bility of deviance within a given range of *control balance desirability* (signified by the arrow to the *control balance desirability* range on the right side of the diagram).

Typically, the control ratio will be at least modestly related to the *control balance desirability* range within which a deviant act is selected. However, not all acts within a given *control balance desirability* range are likely for a person with a corresponding control ratio. To be probable, a given act must be physically possible for the individual at the time and the situational risk must be favorable. Finally, the degree to which the control ratio is related to the *control balance desirability* of a deviant act likely to be committed is affected by the individual’s self-control. Those with moderate to high self-control are more likely to reflect the ‘typical’ control balancing process while those with low self-control are likely to veer from the typical process. Those deviations will be in the direction of producing lower ‘control balance desirable’ deviance than would be expected of the person with a specific control ratio.

The control balancing process is depicted by the Xs between *control ratio*, *opportunity*, *constraint* and *self-control* and the arrow leading to the *control balance desirability* continuum of *deviance*. A theorized interaction, or convergence, of those variables implies that specific combinations of

values for the variables will lead to high or low *control balance desirability* while combinations of different values for the variables can lead to the commission of acts within the middle of the *control balance desirability* continuum. In the extreme case, the probability of a person's committing an act of deviance with very high *control balance desirability* is maximized when (1) the actor has a large control surplus, (2) the actor has the opportunity to commit such acts (he/she can physically do them and they are available at the time of motivation), (3) there are few constraints in the situation and (4) the actor has modest to high self-control. Similarly the probability of a person's committing an act of deviance with a low *control balance desirability* score is maximized when (1) the actor has a low but not overwhelmingly low control ratio, (2) has the opportunity to commit such an act, (3) faces large amounts of constraint in committing other acts of deviance with more *control balance desirability* and (4) has low self-control. However, the chances of the occurrence of a deviant act with medium *control balance desirability* reflect a variety of combinations of values for the variables. Thus, a person likely to commit an act in the middle of the *control balance desirability* continuum can have a small control deficit or a control surplus; can have high, medium or low self-control (the effect of which will interact with the control ratio); and can face low, medium or high constraint (but in all cases there must be the opportunity to do it). Thus, in general, these acts in the mid-range of the *control balance desirability* continuum will be more or less equally associated with high as well as low control imbalances.

## Discussion

### *Summary of proposed changes*

Three problems identified by critics and researchers of control balance theory are addressed with proposed refinements. Specific changes to be made include: (1) merging the repressive and autonomous continua of deviance into one continuum of *control balance desirability*; (2) eliminating all concern with sub-types of deviance that formerly represented zones of the repressive and autonomous continua of deviance, focusing completely on the *continuum* of *control balance desirability* with no categorical or descriptive divisions designated; (3) recognizing that people with control deficits as well as surpluses can potentially resort to similar forms of deviance within ranges of a *control balance desirability* continuum, particularly the middle ranges, rather than implying that those with control surpluses will generally do 'autonomous' deviance while those with control deficits will generally do 'repressive' deviance; (4) theorizing that the likelihood of forms of deviance within wider or narrow ranges of the *control balance desirability* continuum depends on the intersection of four variables—control ratio, opportunity, constraint and self-control; (5) changing self-control from a contingency that affects the extent to which

the control balancing process unfolds with greater or less force to an essential variable affecting the type of deviance likely to be performed; and (6) clarifying the meaning of seriousness, de-emphasizing it as the main counterpoint to motivation, and more explicitly designating it as a contributor to the more important variable of constraint.

### *Comparisons between reformulated and original articulations*

This proposed reformulation is substantial and fundamental. Nevertheless, it bears much in common with the original statement. The refined theory, like the original, predicts that those with balanced control ratios are less likely to do any kind of deviance, although deviance among such people is not impossible. In addition, the reformulated theory classifies submission as a special kind of behavior, not necessarily deviant or conforming but possibly either. It explains submission as a capitulation to overwhelming absence of personal control with an accompanying loss of ability to visualize alternatives in the face of massive potential counter control. In effect, submission occurs when the actor cannot engage in control balancing. For the actor who sinks into submission nothing can be imagined that would help alter the control deficit that is being experienced. Finally, the refined theory retains the notion, contrary to most other extant theories, that those with the most unchecked control are as liable for deviant acts as those with less relative control, and in addition they are more likely to do the kinds of deviance that are usually regarded as most destructive, evil, or selfish. Ironically those acts that are most 'control balance desirable' may have the most dangerous consequences for a collectivity.

This new formulation of control balance theory embraces the basic ideas behind the original statement, but refines its articulation. First, the two accounts assume basic rationality but allow for deviations from it, as when a person, usually one with weak self-control, engages in immediately gratifying acts that produce short-term gains in control at the expense of long-range changes; that is, when a person allows personal desirability of deviant acts to overwhelm *control balance desirability*. Second, both articulations of the theory explain motivation for deviance the same way (a person with an unbalanced control ratio is provoked and cognitively grasps the notion that deviance can alter the situation). Third, each also recognizes the importance of contingencies, such as moral commitments, habits, and personality that may affect how well the causal forces operate. Fourth, both statements allow for patterned behavior that becomes established when specific forms of control balancing succeed and are repeated without much further conscious control balancing being required. Fifth, each recognizes the dynamic nature of causality for deviant acts. Since control ratios, opportunities, and constraints vary over the life course and from

situation to situation, outcomes are not fixed, nor are they easily predictable from prior established conditions. Finally, particular emphases are paramount in both formulations.

Primary among the special emphases is theoretical integration. This refinement, like the original statement, is intended to bring together within a similar causal framework ideas and explanations set forth in prominent extant theories. Some of the integrative elements of the original formulation were specifically identified in the initial statement (Tittle, 1995: 273–82) but four particular additional observations bearing on theoretical integration are also relevant. First, the main variable from self-control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) has been brought into more prominence in the reformulation, in recognition of its empirical success (examples: Hirschi and Gottfredson, 2000; Pratt and Cullen, 2000; Vazsonyi et al., 2001; Turner and Piquero, 2002; Baron, 2003; Romero et al., 2003; Tittle et al., 2003). Second, since self-control theory emphasizes caregiver behaviors that produce self-control in children, presumably through a reinforcement process, it can be regarded as a learning theory. Given this, and the fact that perceptions about provocations, opportunities, and constraint, as well as perceptions about control and the potential of various deviant acts to affect it, are learned, control balance theory can be said to recognize some elements of learning, though it does not explicitly integrate the body of learning theory (Akers, 1985, 1998; Akers and Jensen, 2003) per se. Third, control balance theory appears to be a specific application of the more abstract deviance-causing processes in general strain theory (Agnew, 1992). Control balance theory contends that provocation in the face of a control imbalance (which can be conceived of as a particular kind of strain) produces feelings of humiliation and motivation for deviance (what general strain theory refers to as negative emotions). The motivated (strained, emotive) person attempts to alleviate the control imbalance (strain) or the feelings of humiliation, inadequacy or debasement accompanying it (negative emotions) by means of deviant behavior. Thus, control balance theory can be conceived as putting flesh on the skeleton of general strain theory and going beyond it by specifying that motivation leads to some form of deviance despite various conditions that might, in general strain theory, mandate conventional coping and by trying to generate predictions about the specific forms of deviance (in terms of their *control balance desirability*) likely to be committed. Finally, since the process of provocation outlined by the refined control balance theory bears much in common with impression management theory (Felson, 1978, 1982), control balance can also be said to integrate notions from that argument as well.

A second emphasis of both versions of control balance theory is the 'functional' argument in which deviant behavior is portrayed as an attractive, useful device by which actors can accomplish something important for themselves. In this case, deviance helps solve a problem; it alters a control imbalance and helps relieve bad feelings associated with being made acutely

aware of a control imbalance. But deviance often goes beyond merely relieving bad feelings. Sometimes deviance temporarily produces exhilaration and euphoria and sometimes it produces a long-range sense of satisfaction (Bushman et al., 2001).

A third emphasis in both formulations is the spotlight on control (Gibbs, 1989). Sensitivity to being controlled and desire to control people, things, and situations are portrayed as prime movers in human activity, particularly deviant behavior. In both versions of the theory, control is regarded as simultaneously a generator and restrainer of deviance.

Fourth, the two articulations both attach great import to emotion and situational provocation, variables that have been in the explanatory repertoire for some time (Short and Strodtbeck, 1963, 1965; Luckenbill, 1977; Felson, 1978) but which have been relatively neglected until recently (Katz, 1988, 1999; Scheff and Retzinger, 1991; Birkbeck and LaFree, 1993; Wood et al., 1997; Cooney, 2000).

Finally, like the original formulation, this revision is put forth in the spirit of, and with the expectation of, scientific accountability (see Tittle, 1999). That is, the theory must provide a sense of intellectual satisfaction to a critical audience of scholars and consumers who need to feel that the theory provides answers to causal issues. And, it must lead to hypotheses that end up being supported by empirical evidence. The theory is complex, and its causal processes are seen as operating somewhat differently under different conditions. Therefore, it should permit many hypotheses to be derived. Outcomes from tests of those hypotheses will dictate whether the theoretical approach as a whole has merit; and if it is judged to have merit, empirical tests will indicate whether the particular form of the theory represented by the revision set forth here is adequate or in need of further revision.

## Summary

Revisions to control balance theory are offered to address a logical flaw and to correct mistaken categorization, inconsistencies and conceptual ambiguities in the original formulation as well as to accommodate empirical findings that challenge some of its premises. The reformulated theory addresses three forms of behavior—conformity, deviance and submission. Explanation of deviance of some unspecified kind hinges, as before, on the strength of motivation but explanation of the type of deviance likely to be committed stems from the intersection of motivation with four key variables—the magnitude of one's control ratio, opportunity, constraint and self-control. The outcome of the postulated intersection/interaction is the selection of a form of deviance within a restricted range of a continuum reflecting degrees of *control balance desirability*. *Control balance desirability* is a theoretical construct distinct from the appeal or attractiveness of particular forms of deviance to potential violators, and is defined in terms

of potential long-range effectiveness in altering a control imbalance in a favorable way and in terms of its indirectness or impersonality.

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