

# This Week's Citation Classic

CC/NUMBER 38  
SEPTEMBER 22, 1980

Hirschi T. *Causes of delinquency*.  
Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969. 309 p.

**Using a large sample of adolescents, the predictions of three major theories of delinquency are tested for consistency with the data. Social control theory, the traditional theory of sociological analysis, consistently outperforms its modern competitors. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI™) indicates that this book has been cited over 215 times since 1969.]**

Travis Hirschi  
School of Criminal Justice  
State University of New York  
Albany, NY 12222

August 12, 1980

"I suspect this book is cited for four distinct reasons: the theory of delinquency it advocates, its findings on the correlates of delinquency, the set of data on which it is based, and for the methodology it employs. In any event, my recollections of how the book came to be are compartmentalized along these lines.

"The ideas in the book were common in the literature of sociology and criminology at the time (1964) I decided to order them in some systematic fashion for a dissertation at Berkeley. I had been familiar with these ideas for some time. I had learned to respect them because they had been deemed worthy of explication by David Matza, Irving Piliavin, Erving Goffman, and Neil Smelser, among others.

"The central findings in the book had been reported in the criminological literature over a period of many years. I was familiar with these findings because I had by then been working for several years with Hanan Selvin on a methodological critique of delinquency research.

"My initial plan was simply to put the ideas and the research findings together. With this plan in mind, I went on the job market. I

came home from my first trip east convinced there were more important things than regular employment. The ideas I found exciting and obviously consistent with available data had been treated as contrary to fact, passé, and even appalling. The only way to remedy this situation, it seemed, was to show the ability of the ideas to account for a single body of relevant data.

"Despite the efforts of my dissertation advisor, Charles Y. Glock, I was unable to obtain data for secondary analysis. (In those days, large scale data sets were rare and investigators were perhaps understandably reluctant to release them before they had been thoroughly exploited.) Glock then put me in touch with Alan B. Wilson, whose Richmond Youth Project was just getting underway at the Survey Research Center. Wilson agreed to let me add items to the research instruments in exchange for work on the project. (A NIMH predoctoral fellowship precluded gainful employment and provided large amounts of poverty-induced leisure.) Although I eventually became deputy director of the project, my contributions were mainly clerical (and physical—boxes of questionnaires are heavy), rather than intellectual.

"The key to the book is the body of data on which it is based. I know from experience that the ideas could not otherwise have been sharpened sufficiently to impress sociologists. I know that most of the findings were available (though often ignored) before my work was published. I know too that the statistical analysis is not sufficiently sophisticated by itself to attract more than negative attention. It is therefore fitting that many of the citations to my work stem from the fact that it contains a convenient description of the Richmond Youth Project. Thanks to Wilson's generosity, the Richmond data have been available for secondary analysis of delinquency-related issues almost from the day they were transportable. In fact, my work was cited before it appeared in print in an article based on secondary analysis of the Richmond data."<sup>1</sup>

1. Jensen G. "Crime doesn't pay": correlates of a shared misunderstanding. *Soc. Probl.* 17:189-201, 1969. 302