

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE ACQUISITION
OF SELF-CONTROL OVER TIME

By

Katherine A. Johnson

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Katherine A. Johnson, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2007

Adviser: Kimberly A. Tyler

Although over a decade of empirical evidence suggests a causal link between low self-control and crime, very little research has focused on the prediction of self-control or on how self-control changes over time. The current project centers on the empirical testing of *A General Theory of Crime* (GTC - Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990) and on modeling the developmental nature of the acquisition of self-control throughout childhood and adolescence while testing for gender differences. The GTC is argued to be a general theory, capable of explaining all crime among all people. As such, self-control should be acquired in similar ways and at similar rates among both males and females. Results of the current study have implications for the generality of the GTC as well as the use of gender-neutral theories in the etiology of criminal behavior. I follow 809 young people through five waves of data (from ages 4 - 6 to ages 12 - 14) using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Child and Young Adult Data (NLSY79 - Child and YA). I examine the extent to which males and females differ in the magnitude and shape of their growth in self-control over time, as well as the between-person stability of self-control. In order to do so, I employ latent growth curve analysis with multiple groups in Mplus (Muthén and Muthén 2004). Results show that there is a curvilinear relationship between self-control and time for both males and females such that individuals initially acquire self-control over time, but subsequently lose self-control after levels peak in late childhood. There is between-person stability among males and not among females, although this difference is not statistically significant. No other substantively important gender differences arose. Results are largely supportive of the theory and indicate that males and females may be more similar than they are different in terms of their within and between person change in self-control over time.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Gender is one of the most well documented correlates of crime. Regardless of time, place, or culture, males tend to engage in more crime than females. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (U.S. Department of Justice 2006), approximately 76% of all persons arrested in 2005 were male. More specifically, 82% of those arrested for violent crimes and 68% of those arrested for property crimes were male. The same trend is born out in victimization surveys (U.S. Department of Justice 2000). Further, this gap appears to be stable over time. Recent research has concluded that there was little or no change in the gender gap in interpersonal violence from 1980 to 2003 based on data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Report and the National Crime Victimization Survey (Steffensmeier et al., 2006). Despite this clear trend, few satisfactory explanations exist regarding the gender gap in crime. Scholars have argued about the utility of traditional gender-neutral theories, and some have concluded that gender-specific theories are necessary if female crime is to truly be understood. Among the numerous gender-neutral theories of crime is Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) *A General Theory of Crime* (GTC). According to the GTC, individuals who have low self-control are more likely to engage in crime than those who have developed higher self-control. This relationship is argued to be gender-neutral and is claimed to be capable of explaining the gender gap in crime. Males and females with similar levels of self-control will tend to commit similar amounts of crime. Because females typically have higher levels of self-control, the GTC asserts, they thus tend to commit less crime.

Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that self-control is acquired via parental socialization prior to age 8 to 10 and that it remains relatively stable between people thereafter. Based on this contention, it can be assumed that self-control, because it is not innate and must be acquired, is at its lowest level at birth and increases over time. After age 8 to 10, levels of self-control are argued to remain flexible but the differences between people become fixed; those who are ranked high relative to others will remain highly ranked while those who are ranked low will likely remain low. Beyond this, however, very few theoretical or empirical statements have been made regarding the growth or acquisition of self-control, the shape that this growth takes over time, or the extent to which there is between-person stability in self-control after ages 8 to 10. Further, research has not assessed the extent to which gender plays a part in these relationships. This paper addresses this gap in the literature by answering the following research questions: Is self-control acquired in the same way by both males and females? In other words, does self-control grow at similar rates for both genders over time? Additionally, the stability postulate of the GTC has important implications for the study of gender differences in crime as well. Are the between-person differences in self-control over time stable among both males and females? The answers to these research questions will provide valuable insight into the generality of this self-professed “general” theory of crime and may shed light on the gender gap in crime and delinquency. If results show that boys and girls acquire self-control differently (i.e., at different rates) or that there is not between-person stability among both males and females, the generality of the GTC may need to be reevaluated. Although the theorists only claim gender-neutrality in the relationship between self-control and crime, findings that support a gender-specific

process of acquisition or results that are inconsistent with the stability postulate among either (or both) genders would call into question the generality, and more specifically, the gender-neutrality of this theory.

The following dissertation includes 6 chapters. In Chapter 1 (Introduction), I have introduced the gender gap in crime, the concept of gender-neutral and gender-specific theories, and have listed two main research questions to be addressed. Further, this chapter discussed the generality of the GTC and the implications the findings of the current study may have regarding this generality. In the following chapter (Chapter 2 - Literature Review), I review the literature on gender differences in crime and delinquency and discuss the arguments for and against gender-neutral and gender-specific theories. I also give an overview of Gottfredson and Hirschi's GTC and the empirical evidence regarding this theory, discuss the GTC within the context of gender, and discuss what little research exists regarding the acquisition and stability of self-control. Because this dissertation is so deeply rooted in theory, Chapter 2 (i.e., the Literature Review) encompasses both the explanation of the theory as well as an in-depth review of the literature regarding the empirical tests of the theory. Chapter 3 (Methodology) describes the data, sample, measures, and procedure used to test the research questions empirically. Chapter 4 (Results) delineates the results of these empirical tests, and Chapter 5 (Discussion) discusses these results and ties them back to previous research. Chapter 6 (Conclusion) includes a discussion of what the results of the current study imply for the GTC.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following chapter, I will first review the literature pertaining to the gender differences in crime and delinquency. Following this portion of the chapter, I will give an overview of the debate within criminology between those who advocate the use of gender-neutral theories of crime versus those who advocate a gender-specific approach. I will then explain that the GTC has long been touted as a general theory of crime capable of explaining criminal behavior among all people at all times and that by definition then, this theory purports gender-neutrality. This gender-neutrality, however, as I will explain, has not been tested beyond the relationship between self-control and crime. It is possible that although the causal mechanism of the theory is gender-neutral, the acquisition of self-control and the stability of self-control between people is in fact gender specific. This is an area of research that is ripe for exploration. Following this discussion, I will more closely address the theoretical contentions regarding the acquisition and stability of self-control as well as the few empirical tests of these theoretical postulates. These sections will also include a discussion of gender within the context of acquisition and stability, which will highlight the absence of literature in this regard.

Gender Differences in Crime and Delinquency

The gender-crime relationship is one of the strongest and least disputed in criminological research. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), “men are always and everywhere more likely than women to commit criminal acts” (pp. 145). A multitude of researchers have found support for this contention (Cernkovich and Giordano 1979;

Elliot 1994; LaGrange and Silverman 1999; Nagel and Hagan 1983; Nakhaie, Silverman, and LaGrange 2000; Nichols et al. 2006; Rhodes and Fischer 1993; Smith and Visser 1980; Steffensmeier and Allan 2000; Steffensmeier, Allan, and Streifel 1989; Steffensmeier et al. 2006; Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill 1992; Tittle and Paternoster 2000; Tittle, Ward, and Grasmick 2003a; Warren 1991; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985). Whether data are obtained from victimization surveys (U.S. Department of Justice 2000), self-reports (Mears, Ploeger, and Warr 1998; Tittle et al. 2003a), or official statistics (U.S. Department of Justice 1997; U.S. Department of Justice 2006) males are consistently found to be involved in more crime and delinquency than females, especially regarding serious offenses (Miller 1998; Rhodes and Fischer 1993). According to the Uniform Crime Report compiled by the FBI (U.S. Department of Justice 2000), arrests of males outnumbered females 2:1 in the year 2000. Further, females are much more likely to be arrested for status offenses such as running away from home (Rhodes and Fischer 1993) and prostitution (Chesney-Lind and Shelden 2004) despite the fact that boys and girls are equally likely to commit status offenses (Rhodes and Fischer 1993). Although the gender gap in crime appears to widen or narrow slightly depending upon where data are obtained, an undeniable gender gap in crime remains regardless of the source (Messerschmidt 1993). Additionally, research shows that although males and females tend to exhibit similar *patterns* of offending (i.e., similar types of offenses, similar onset and desistance patterns, etc.), males exhibit higher *magnitudes* of offending than females (Cernkovich and Giordano 1979; Hindelang 1971). In general, criminologists tend to agree that the gender gap in crime is universal (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Mears et al. 1998; Steffensmeier and Allan 1996).

What have been less universal, however, are the purported reasons for the gender gap in offending. These reasons have ranged from differences in exposure to, or in the effects of, attachment (Heimer and DeCoster 1999), opportunity or familial monitoring (Adler 1975; Adler 1977; Adler 1981; Burton et al. 1998; Canter 1982; Heimer 1996; Heimer and DeCoster 1999; Jensen and Eve 1976; Simon 1975), gender role socialization (Gilligan 1982; Giordano and Cernkovich 1979; Hagan, Simpson, and Gillis 1987; Heimer 1995, Heimer 1996; Heimer and DeCoster 1999; Horowitz and White 1987; Shover et al. 1979; Simpson and Elis 1995), biology or evolutionary differences (Campbell, Muncer, and Bibel 2001; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985), delinquent peers (Heimer and DeCoster 1999; Mears et al. 1998), or structural level mechanisms (Messerschmidt 1986). Further, the extent to which males and females offend for the same reasons (i.e., same ‘causes’, different magnitudes; a gender-neutral approach) or different reasons (a gender-specific approach) has been a point of contention for theorists.

Gender-Specific verses Gender-Neutral Theory Debate

Until recently, most mainstream criminological theory has been written by men about men, and tested on samples consisting only of men. Despite this, the discipline remains “gender-blind”, meaning that although offenders are overwhelmingly male, the gendered nature of their behavior has been largely ignored (Messerschmidt 1993). Criminology has typically overlooked female criminality (Smart 1977; Smart 1995). When women *have* been considered, most theorists have simply extended male-based theories to females. Others have acknowledged women’s invisibility in criminological scholarship, but have continued to, “treat men as the norm and women as anomalies”

(Flavin 2001:273). Put another way, “men and boys are the yardstick against which the conduct of women and girls is measured” (Messerschmidt 1993:4). Theories such as subcultural (Miller 1958), control (Hirschi 1969), anomie (Merton 1938), differential association (Sutherland and Cressey 1978), among others were all developed to explain male criminality. When female offenders were mentioned in these theories, it was most often to say that their numbers were small and thus they were uninteresting as a group (Cohen 1955) or were merely a footnote (Hirschi 1969).

In the past three decades, however, attention has been drawn to the criminality and delinquency of females. Since then, there has been much debate regarding the extent to which mainstream gender-neutral theories are able to explain female criminality or whether gender-specific theories must be developed (c.f., Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988; Leonard 1982; Smith and Paternoster 1987).

In Support of Gender-Specific Theories

Some feminist scholars argue that traditional gender-neutral theories of crime are insufficient in explaining female criminality (Adler 1975; Berger 1989; Campbell 1990; Chesney-Lind 1989; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon 2004; Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988; Klein 1973; Leonard 1982; Makarios 2007; Mason and Windle 2002; Messerschmidt 1993; Naffine and Gale 1989; Smart 1977; Wesely 2006) and empirical evidence has begun to mount (Broidy and Agnew 1997; De Li and MacKenzie 2003; Heimer 1996; Heimer and DeCoster 1999; LaGrange and Silverman 1999). They claim that the causal process of offending is different for males and females because of the gendered nature of

the social world (Chesney-Lind and Shelden 2004; Heimer and DeCoster 1999; McCarthy, Hagan, and Woodward 1999; Ogle, Maier-Katkin, and Bernard 1995; Steffensmeier and Allan 1996). Women and girls generally experience far less power at the both the interpersonal (Lorber 1998) and societal level (Risman 1998) and gender stratification, according to feminist scholars, is related to every aspect of social life including the commission of crime and delinquency. Because of this power differential, females are exposed to very different experiences that may affect their likelihood of committing acts of crime and delinquency.

Females also simply may have fewer opportunities to commit acts of crime and delinquency by virtue of their secondary status. For example, females may experience discrimination within gangs which may limit their access to criminal opportunity (Miller 2001). Additionally, females are typically monitored more closely within their families during childhood and adolescence (Li, Feigman, and Stanton 2000; Longmore, Manning, and Giordano 2001) and greater monitoring has been linked to lower levels of criminal and delinquent behavior (Laird et al. 2003).

Further, there are many factors outside of opportunity that may have an effect on the delinquency of females such as female's differential exposure to childhood sexual abuse. Research has shown that rates of childhood sexual abuse are much higher among females than males (Browne and Finkelhor 1986), and the link between childhood abuse and delinquency has been found to be stronger among females than among males (Belknap and Holsinger 2006; Makarios 2007; McCormack, Janus, and Burgess 1986;

Rhodes and Fischer 1993). Because of this, Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2004) argue that a theory of female delinquency must take childhood sexual abuse and victimization into account. Chesney-Lind (1989) argues that female delinquency has been long misunderstood, in part, because it has been sexualized by the juvenile justice system and because female survival strategies have been criminalized. Further, Chesney-Lind (1989) argues that, women experience oppression as a result of the actions of a juvenile justice system that has worked to reinforce male dominance in a patriarchal society. Women and girls are often viewed as criminals when they are in fact victims. The end result of this system is the further subordination of women and the reinforcement of patriarchal authority. Indeed, Wesely states that the women in her study committed acts of violence, “as a way of resisting and responding to their cumulative victimization”, which she describes as being characterized by, “abuse and violence, economic vulnerability, gender inequality, loss and dislocation, degradation, and social exclusion” (2006:303).

Because of stark gender differences in economic status, dependency, and power, female delinquency can only be understood within the context of female experiences. Issues such as these lead some scholars to advocate gender-specific theories of deviance that may better reflect the lived experiences of females. Because traditional theories were originally designed to explain male criminality, it is posited that they are not applicable to the lives of women and girls. Some researchers thus contend that new theories must be created that specifically address the experiences of females. More specifically, Klein (1973) and Leonard (1973) have tested the utility of applying gender-neutral theories of crime to women (e.g., anomie theory, labeling theory, differential association theory,

subculture theory, Marxism), and both researchers found these theories to provide insufficient explanations of female criminality. Feminist scholar Meda Chesney-Lind has labeled this the “add women and stir” approach, and claimed that it discounts the unique experiences of females (Chesney-Lind 1986).

In Support of Gender-Neutral Theories

In contrast to those who advocate gender-specific theories of crime, many researchers and theorists argue for the utility of gender-neutral theories of crime (Rosenbaum 1987; Rowe, Vazsonyi, and Flannery 1995; Smith 1979). It has been contended that before hastily discounting theories originally developed to test male criminality, they should first be sufficiently tested on female samples in order to determine if they retain their explanatory power (Canter 1982; Figueria-McDonald and Selo 1980; Smith and Paternoster 1987). Social control, self-control, differential association, and strain theories have typically been seen as ‘general’ theories, capable of explaining all crimes among all people (c.f., Agnew 1992; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Hirschi 1969; Sutherland and Cressey 1955). Proponents of these and other gender-neutral theories argue that differences in offending by gender result from differential exposure to the same factors such as opportunity to commit crime, exposure to delinquent peers, and so on (Cernkovich and Giordano 1979; Figueria-McDonald and Selo 1980; Rhodes and Fischer 1993; Schur 1969; Simons et al. 1980; Sutherland and Cressey 1978). Empirical research has often supported the utility of various gender-neutral theories such as social control theory (Elliot and Voss 1974; Jensen and Eve 1976; Krohn and Massey 1980; Smith 1979; Smith and Paternoster 1987), power-control theory

(Hagan, Gillis, and Simpson 1985; Hagan et al., 1987), differential opportunity theory (Datesman, Scarpitti, and Stephenson 1975; Smith 1979; Rankin 1980; Simons et al. 1980), deterrence theory (Anderson, Chiricos, and Waldo 1977; Burkett and Jensen 1975; Richards and Tittle 1981; Smith 1979; Smith and Paternoster 1987), differential association theory (Elliott and Voss 1974; Simons et al. 1980; Smith and Paternoster 1987), and strain or anomie theory (Smith and Paternoster 1987) in the explanation of male and female crime. Thus, rather than focusing on individual-level variables such as biological and psychological abnormalities, as research on female criminality has typically done in the past (Giordano 1978; Smart 1995), gender-neutral theories assume that the criminogenic factors that are relevant in the study of male crime are also relevant in the study of female crime.

The GTC is, by definition, a gender-neutral theory of criminality. The authors argue that the relationship between self-control and crime is gender-neutral and that gender differences in crime rates stem from gender differences in self-control. What is less clear, however, is the process of acquisition of self-control and the extent to which it is gender-neutral. The GTC explains that self-control is predicated upon parenting and socialization, and that crime and delinquency are associated with the resulting levels of self-control. Parenting and socialization, however, are likely to be influenced by the gender of the child (e.g., daughters typically experience more monitoring than sons do) and females are socialized to have more self-control and thus commit fewer crimes than their male counterparts. In this way, the GTC may not be gender-neutral in its entirety. It is possible that the “front” portion of the theory, which was only vaguely explicated in A

General Theory of Crime and has been largely ignored empirically, is not gender-neutral. This portion of the theory may benefit from the inclusion of gender-specific concepts. At the very least, I argue that it is crucial that this theory be thoroughly tested in its entirety before any conclusions can be made regarding its generality or gender-neutrality.

Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime

Self-control, explicated in *A General Theory of Crime* (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), is a regularly cited (Wright 2000) and widely supported (Pratt and Cullen 2000) theoretical concept employed in the study of criminal behavior. All else being equal, individuals with low self-control are said to be less able to defer gratification and resist the immediate rewards offered by criminal opportunity. Because this quality is potentially damaging for those who exhibit it, as well as for the social order as a whole, the etiology of self-control is of central importance.

Self-control has been used in the explanation of deviant behaviors ranging from skipping college classes (Gibbs and Giever 1995), engaging in risky sexual behavior (Hope and Chapple 2005), computer software piracy (Higgins 2005), smoking, drinking and gambling (Arneklev et al. 1993) to more serious delinquent and criminal outcomes such as driving under the influence of alcohol (Keane, Maxim, and Teevan 1993), and violent offending and homicide victimization (Piquero et al. 2005).

Gottfredson and Hirschi, in *A General Theory of Crime* (1990), assert that the most important factor in the prediction of criminal behavior is low self-control. They then

go beyond this to assert that low self-control is the main causal agent not only in crime, but also in a variety of behaviors that are “analogous” to crime or what Arneklev and colleagues (1993) refer to as “imprudent behavior” (e.g., having a quick temper, little tenacity in finishing tasks). Based on this, people with low levels of self-control, “will tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, short-sighted, and non-verbal, and they will tend therefore to engage in criminal and analogous acts” (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:90). Because individuals with low self-control prefer short-term, immediate pleasure, they are likely to not only engage in criminal acts to get what they want (e.g., money without working, relief from frustration without problem solving), but are also likely to exhibit other behaviors that are legal, but analogous to crime (e.g., drinking, involvement in unstable personal relationships, sexual promiscuity) (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Paternoster and Brame 1998). In short, self-control is manifested in one’s ability to resist the innate human impulse to satisfy needs and desires in the easiest available way; criminal or not. Although Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) acknowledge the possibility that there may be other forces at work as well (e.g., biological differences, differential criminal opportunity), self-control remains the single most important predictor of criminal behavior within the GTC.

Gender and the General Theory of Crime

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that, “gender differences for all types of crime are established early in life and that they persist throughout life. This fact implies a substantial self-control difference between the sexes” (147). Indeed, several studies have found that girls have higher levels of self-control than boys (Burton et al. 1998; Hayslett-

McCall and Bernard 2002; Hope and Chapple 2005; LaGrange and Silverman 1999; Tittle et al. 2003a; Turner and Piquero 2002; Winfree et al. 2006). Further, the role that gender plays within the GTC has been assessed, and most research finds that self-control is a good predictor of both boys' and girls' delinquency (Burton et al. 1998; Hayslett-McCall and Bernard 2002; LaGrange and Silverman 1999; Tittle et al., 2003a). Findings from a recent study by Higgins and Tewksbury (2006), however, suggest that although the GTC explains delinquency among both males and females, the theory more strongly predicted male delinquency than female delinquency. Overall however, the general theory of crime appears to be gender invariant; low self-control tends to predict involvement in criminal and delinquent behavior regardless of gender.

In sum, the GTC states that although girls often have higher levels of self-control than boys, and this contributes to their lower rates of offending, the relationship between self-control and crime is gender neutral. This implies gender invariance in the relationship between self-control and crime and gender neutrality in the GTC.

Acquisition of Self-Control

Based on the growing knowledge regarding the negative outcomes of low self-control, clarification of the antecedents of self-control as well as information on the process of acquisition of self-control have become paramount. According to control theories in general (Hirschi 1969; Kornhauser 1978), and the GTC (1990) in particular, all individuals are equally hedonistic by nature and are born as naturally pleasure seeking beings. Self-control, therefore is not an innate trait within humans, but must be instilled

in childhood via positive parenting and socialization according to the GTC. In order to instill self-control in their children, caregivers must: 1) monitor the child's behavior, 2) recognize deviant acts when they occur, and 3) appropriately punish the child for engaging in the deviant act. In addition, attachment is a necessary but insufficient precondition to the above noted criteria. Although Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that parental socialization is paramount in the acquisition of self-control, this premise has rarely been tested. Indeed, the theorists themselves acknowledged that they know more about the consequences of low self-control than what predicts it (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:94).

Among the studies that have used parenting constructs as correlates or predictors of self-control, most have done so only implicitly by testing the contemporaneous association of parenting constructs and self-control (Hope and Chapple 2005; Wright et al. 1999), or the indirect effects of parenting on crime and delinquency via self-control (Chapple, Hope, and Whiteford 2005; Feldman and Weinberger 1994; Perrone et al. 2004; Gibbs, Giever, and Higgins 2003; Gibbs, Giever, and Martin 1998; Hay 2001; Polakowski 1994). Those studies that have specifically focused on the prediction of self-control (Beaver and Wright 2005; Cochran et al. 1998; Hope, Grasmick and Pointon 2003; Pratt, Turner and Piquero 2004; Turner, Piquero and Pratt 2005), although predominantly supportive of Gottfredson and Hirschi's contentions, have often been plagued by small sample sizes, retrospective reports, or inadequate measures and methods.

Recently, work employing a nationally representative prospective longitudinal data set has augmented the growing body of research surrounding the prediction of self-control (Chapple and Johnson 2007; Pratt et al., 2004; Turner et al., 2005). This research has indeed found self-control to be associated with parenting (as well as other factors). What these studies did not include, however, was the prediction of self-control before age 10 or the modeling of growth in self-control over time. Therefore, despite the considerable merit of this work, improvement is possible by analyzing data on younger children, following them for a greater number of years, and utilizing more sophisticated data analytic techniques. Thus, although recent research has begun to account for the prediction of self-control at one point in time (Beaver and Wright 2005; Cochran et al. 1998; Chapple and Johnson 2007; Hope et al. 2003; Pratt et al. 2004; Turner et al. 2005), much remains to be discovered regarding the process of acquisition over time, especially with regards to gender differences.

Although Gottfredson and Hirschi clearly state that females have a higher mean level of self-control than males and that it is this difference that accounts for gender differences in crime, they are silent as to *why* this mean level of self-control is different between genders. Further, they neglect to address the extent to which the process of acquiring self-control is gender-neutral. It is entirely possible, as Power-Control Theory suggests, that within a patriarchal and gender stratified social system, the ways in which boys and girls acquire self-control differ (Hagan et al., 1985; Hagan et al., 1987; Hagan, Simpson and Gillis 1988). Power-control theory argues that boys are encouraged and allowed to take risks and experience less parental monitoring than girls and that this

ultimately leads to the gender gap in delinquency via preference for risk. Self-control is thus the consequence of gendered socialization and in turn, the emergence of self-control looks very different for boys and girls.

Although the few articles addressing the acquisition of self-control often include gender in the analyses, it is most often as a control variable and not the main focus of the investigation. Hope and colleagues (2003) use demographics, family structural variables, and family process variables to predict self-control. They hypothesized that gender would exert a direct effect on level of self-control and that this effect would not be mediated by family structure or process. This contention was supported by their findings (although the data were cross-sectional and thus causality was difficult to determine), and gender was associated with self-control net of the effects of other demographics, structure, and process. According to Hope and colleagues (2003) then, the traditional predictors of self-control as laid out by Gottfredson and Hirschi are not predicated upon gender. It was not differential exposure to the same criminogenic factors that led to gender differences in levels of self-control; it was something else. The effect of gender was not explained by parenting. This research, although it incorporates gender, does not explain why or how gender is related to self-control. Recent work by Chapple and Johnson (2007), however, has begun to address this gap in the literature. Results of multiple group path analyses completed on a national longitudinal data set showed that relationships between discipline and self-control and attachment and self-control were significantly different by gender.

Hay (2001) controls for gender in his analyses and never addresses its effect on self-control. Other researchers include gender in their analyses and find it to be directly related to self-control, but do not offer any further explanation of the specifics of the relationship (Chapple et al. 2005; Hope and Chapple 2005; Burt, Simons, and Simons 2006; Perrone et al. 2004). Perrone and associates (2004) found gender to be related to self-control after controlling for parenting in a large nationally representative sample, however their data are cross-sectional, and their discussion of gender is scarce. Gibbs and colleagues (1998) found gender to be unrelated to “parental management”, but directly related to self-control and to delinquency. These findings indicate that although one’s gender significantly affects one’s level of self-control, this relationship is not mediated via parenting.

Most prior research has neglected the prediction of self-control in general, and gender differences in the prediction of self-control specifically. In addition, none has investigated self-control as a growth process over time or gender’s role in this dynamic process. In sum, little research on the prediction or acquisition of self-control exists, and none of it adequately addresses gender differences. The first research question assessed in this study (i.e., Does self-control emerge in the same way for boys and girls?) will provide clarification on the gender differences in the process of acquisition of self-control over time. Thus, the current study will address the gap in the literature by assessing the emergence of self-control over five waves using multiple groups latent growth curve analysis with data from a nationally representative prospective longitudinal survey. The