



A Macat analysis of Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi's A General Theory of Crime

William J. Jenkins

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Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi's 1990 work, *A General Theory of Crime*, assessed contemporary work in criminology, while also introducing a new, comprehensive theory of crime.

At the time, researchers tended to focus on environmental factors that led to crime, not on the criminals themselves. Additionally, crime researchers came from different disciplines and inclined towards thinking about crime only from their particular academic perspective. This meant ideas about what caused crime, and how to prevent it, were often in conflict.

Gottfredson and Hirschi believed criminology should get back to its roots by examining how crime is connected to human behavior. Drawing on important philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Hobbes, they developed their self-control theory of crime, suggesting all crime can be explained by the amount of self-control a person can exercise. Gottfredson and Hirschi claimed their theory could explain all types of crime in all contexts, and they hoped it would inspire new research and new policy decisions. The book became hugely influential and is still relevant today.

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