

Testing fundamental control balance theory propositions: examining the causes/correlates of control balance ratios, general deviance, and deviant acts within ranges of control balance desirability

Ph.D Dissertation

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Abstract

Control balance theory (Tittle, 1995, 2004) has received little empirical scrutiny over the last decade. This dissertation is the first study to thoroughly examine the correlates and causes of general control balance ratios, general deviance, and deviant acts within ranges of control balance desirability. Primary data were collected to test these hypotheses by creating an original survey and administering it to a one-stage cluster probability sample of UM - St. Louis students during the summer of 2004. Four hundred forty students were surveyed. A series of linear regression models, Mests, and binomial logistic regression models were conducted to examine the three categories of hypotheses. Control ratios were examined at the general (using both the recoded Piquero-Hickman and Bossler methods), specific realm, and situational levels. To test the causes of general deviance and deviant acts within ranges of control balance desirability, respondents were asked to read first-person scenarios and decide how they would act in those situations.

This dissertation did not find consistently strong evidence to support control balance theory, although the evidence can be viewed as "partial" support. Although most variables were not significant predictors of general control balance ratios, sex, race, and personally-rooted elements had the strongest influences. The effect of deviant motivation on general deviance was robust, while control imbalances were not. Regression models ran for one scenario found almost no support for control balance theory's predictions regarding the causes of deviant acts within ranges of control balance desirability. In the second scenario, control ratios at three levels were significant with deviant acts with higher levels of control balance desirability, but in the wrong direction. Significant interaction effects between self-control and control ratios at all three levels were found in the second scenario. Future research suggestions, primarily focusing on measurement improvements, are made.