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Jalen Smith

Winthrop University, smithj133@winthrop.edu

Matthew Hayes

Winthrop University, hayesm@winthrop.edu

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A Comparison of Arrested and Not Arrested Individuals Using Facebook

Jalen Smith
Matthew Hayes, Ph.D. (Mentor)

ABSTRACT

Social networking sites, like Facebook, have had an enormous impact on how people form relationships and the type of behavior that is shared with the public. The Social Bond Theory, created by Travis Hirschi (1969), states that individuals who have weak bonds to conventional society are more likely to commit acts of deviance than those who have strong bonds to conventional society. Going further with regards to Social Bond Theory, Hirschi (1960) along with Sampson and Laub (1990) and Salvatore and Taniguchi (2012) believed that strong bonds to the specific institutions of conformity to the norm of society, religion, work, education, activity not considered deviant, nation, military, family, and marriage are what deter an individual from committing deviant behavior. Alternatively, the Differential Association Theory, created by Edwin Sutherland (1947), states that individuals learn techniques, motivations, and attitudes towards deviant behavior from their peers. Both theories were tested against one another through examination of post and picture content of individuals who had and had not been arrested. Participants in this study were between the ages of 18-30, and had either been arrested in Rock Hill, SC within the year 2016 ($n = 40$) or had graduated from a high school in Rock Hill, SC ($n = 38$). Posts and pictures were examined and coded as: cannot be determined, conventional, unconventional, both, or moderate. Further, conventional posts and pictures were coded as: conformity to the norm of society, religion, work, education, activity not considered deviant, nation, military, family, and marriage. Results revealed that individuals who were arrested posted more unconventional posts than individuals who had not been arrested, while individuals who had not been arrested posted more conventional posts than individuals who had been arrested. Findings also indicate that the arrested group posted slightly more posts about marriage and family as compared to the not arrested group, suggesting that age plays a role in the importance of specific institutions. Overall, Social Bond Theory was better supported in this study through both posts and pictures collectively.

Keywords: Social Bond Theory, Differential Association Theory, Facebook, deviance, conventional

The use of the Internet, and specifically social networking sites, has increased tremendously within the past decade. Internet penetration, the percentage in which one region of a population uses the Internet, has reached 89.0% in North America alone (World Internet Users and 2017 Population Stats, 2017; Surfing and Site Guide: Internet and World Stats, 2017). As of June 30, 2016, 1,679,433,530 people worldwide have utilized Facebook (World Internet Users and 2017 Population Stats, 2017). Looking solely at North America, 223,081,200 people interact and have profiles

on this social network site (World Internet Users and 2017 Population Stats, 2017). Much of the literature pertaining to social networking sites has focused primarily on the subjects of cyber deviance, gang offender usage, and general interactions of individuals on social networking sites. The aforementioned examples of topics that the current literature focuses on in connection with the social networking site demonstrates how narrowly focused this field has been when it comes to the types of deviance examined. A further example of this narrowness is through the studies that have currently used

Facebook. Previous studies have focused on the appropriateness of profile photographs, topics of discussion, and interactions of individuals based on race (Fernandes, Guircanu, Bowers, & Neely, 2010; Laudone, 2010; Hum et al., 2011).

With increased access to the Internet and social networking sites, views on acceptable mediums to display deviance have changed drastically from what they were in the past. Looking back at the “Stop Snitchin” doctrine, this code of silence allowed deviance and crime to exist without fear of punishment (Smiley, 2015). Smiley (2015) notes that individuals who engaged in deviant behavior at one point in time adopted the “Stop Snitchin” campaign where contact with law enforcement was discouraged via rap lyrics. Speaking on the topic of not snitching, a man named Cam’ron stated that snitching would hurt his livelihood, and that he was raised not to tell on others; a philosophy that others were not brought up on (Smiley, 2015). Evidence of a shift in public awareness of deviance can be viewed through the evolution of rap culture and how it uses social media.

Due to the increased use of the Internet and social networking sites overall, the presentation and public awareness of deviant behavior has thrived (Smiley, 2015). With social media becoming increasingly popular over time, it became fertile ground for the doctrine “YOLO,” you only live once (Smiley, 2015). Hand in hand with the “YOLO” doctrine, the urge for individuals to engage in self-promotion flourished (Smiley, 2015). By having pictures, posts, and videos available for consumption online 24/7, the Internet and social networking sites have allowed a venue for criminals to display their power, authority, and status to others in their community (Smiley, 2015). An example of self-promotion of deviant behavior through the “YOLO” doctrine is when rapper Twan Gotti rapped in explicit detail about a cold case which eventually led to his arrest for murder (Smiley, 2015). In essence, Gotti displayed his awareness that his actions were deviant through his lyrics that boasted significantly about the crime he committed (Smiley, 2015). Twan Gotti’s arrest and fate was due to the increase of public awareness of

deviance through social media in combination with his desire to promote himself through his lyrics.

The push for power, status, and prestige online led to a code of silence that enabled people to reclaim a sense of control of their life from society, and especially law enforcement (Smiley, 2015). This enhanced sense of control of one’s life allowed one to feel as though they were not below society and law enforcement, but more on a similar level (Smiley, 2015). Alternatively, “YOLO” encouraged individuals who engage in deviant behavior to taunt law enforcement through displays of their deviant exploits (Smiley, 2015). This taunting nature of engagement in criminal acts through the use of social networking sites further shifted the balance of power and prestige back into the hands of the deviant individuals (Smiley, 2015). The back and forth battle for who has power and the meaning of one’s status further exemplifies an individual’s place in society.

Travis Hirschi, the creator of Social Bond Theory, believed that individuals who have tight bonds to conventional society, like family and school, are less likely to engage in deviance (Hirschi, 1969). Consequently, it was believed that individuals who have weak bonds to conventional society are more likely to engage in deviance (Hirschi, 1969). Stemming from Travis Hirschi’s traditional elements of social bond, Sampson and Laub (1990) argued that bonds to work and family specifically determine whether or not an individual pursues a life of crime and deviance. They contend that higher education, vocational training, work, and marriage act as institutions of social control in which young adults are supposed to stay away from deviant behavior (Sampson & Laub, 1990). The bonds to higher education, vocational training, work, and marriage by themselves do not decrease the probability that an individual will engage in deviant behavior (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Sampson and Laub (1990) state that the quality or strength of bonds to those institutions is what leads to the decrease in probability that the individual will engage in deviant behavior.

Similarly to Sampson and Laub, Salvatore and Taniguchi (2012) found that

changes in social bonds created by marriage, employment, military, and religion alter offending behavior. A study conducted by King and his colleagues (2007) found that marriage reduces offending regarding individuals who are male. With the knowledge from previous studies and correlation analyses, Salvatore and Taniguchi (2012) noted that specific demographics of individuals, like being male, not being married, not having children, and serving in the military were all characteristics of people who scored significantly higher on the crime outcome measure. This study demonstrates that certain bonds, strong or weak ones, to certain institutions, family and/or work, matter when viewing the likelihood of an individual to offend.

Differential Association Theory states that an individual learns the attitudes, techniques, and motivations of deviant behavior through interactions with others (Maratea & Kavanaugh, 2012). The idea that interpersonal interactions with other individuals can have a profound effect on one's deviant identity or lack of one is central to the Differential Association Theory (Maratea & Kavanaugh, 2012). An individual's surroundings and how they assimilate to their environment caused deviant behavior to occur in conjunction with their prospective peers (Gaylord & Galliher, 1990, p. 112). The influence that interpersonal relationships have on an individual can be seen through identity formation and overall behavior (Maratea & Kavanaugh, 2012). Maratea and Kavanaugh (2012) believe that labeling causes the internalization of one's deviant identity, and that, as a result of internalizing a label, the individual then fails to assimilate into mainstream society. This new identity that is embraced by the individual is often encouraged by deviant peers who have formed an interpersonal relationship with that particular person (Maratea & Kavanaugh, 2012). With the acquisition of a deviant identity, an individual interacts with other people who share similar identities to their own, thus reinforcing the main principles of differential association.

Utilizing the theoretical frame work of Differential Association Theory, Hochstetler, Copes, and DeLisi (2002) examined how a

person's interactions with their friends could induce general, group, and solo deviance. Researchers predicted that the relationship between friends' attitudes toward deviant behavior would mediate that individual's own attitude toward said behavior (Hochstetler, Copes, & DeLisi, 2002). This study found that both friends' attitudes and behavior determined the likelihood that an individual would offend (Hochstetler, Copes, & DeLisi, 2002). Results of this study also found that friends' attitudes and behaviors were significant even when individuals committed a crime alone (Hochstetler, Copes, & DeLisi, 2002). This study reinforced Differential Association Theory by highlighting that crime is learned and engaged upon through the influence of others (Hochstetler, Copes, & DeLisi, 2002). Overall, the influence of friends on one's likelihood to commit crime, whether direct or indirect, demonstrates how powerful interactions with those close to us truly are.

HYPOTHESES

- **Hypothesis 1:** According to Differential Association Theory, arrested individuals will post more unconventional posts and pictures than not arrested individuals, while there will be no difference in the posting of conventional posts and pictures.
- **Hypothesis 2:** According to Social Bond Theory, not arrested individuals will post more conventional posts and pictures than arrested individuals, while there will be no difference in the posting of unconventional posts and pictures.

METHODS

Participants

A total of 78 participants, individuals who had or had not been arrested, were recruited. Participants were either arrested in Rock Hill, SC or demonstrated that they lived in Rock Hill.

The sample of participants who had been arrested in 2016 ($n = 40$) were recruited from data obtained from the Rock Hill Police

Department. A friend request was then sent to prospective participants if their profile was not public. If the friend request was accepted, an invitation to participate in the study was sent, which included a link to an Informed Consent form. According to the South Carolina Incident Based Reporting System training manual, Group A offenses are offenses in which law enforcement must report both incident and arrest, while Group B offenses need only the arrest to be recorded (*South Carolina Incident Based Reporting System Training Manual*, 2014). Examples of Group A type offenses within the arrested group were: possession of methamphetamine, financial transaction card fraud, and domestic violence in the second degree. Examples of Group B type offenses within the arrested group were: public disorderly conduct, driving under suspension, and minor under the influence. Twenty-four out of the forty arrested individuals committed Group A type of offenses, while the remaining sixteen arrested individuals committed Group B type of offenses.

A sample of participants who had not been arrested in 2016 ($n = 6$) were recruited from Rock Hill High Schools' pages on Facebook. The remainder of the sample of participants who had not been arrested in 2016 ($n = 32$) were obtained by using a random name generator (Random Name Generator, 2017). Once a name was generated, the researcher input that name into Facebook's search bar. Friend requests were again sent to prospective participants if their profile was not already public.

If a prospective participant was the same race, gender, and lived in the same city of an arrested participant, then that individual was selected to be a control in an effort to match both groups evenly. Basic demographic information was also recorded, and is shown in tables 1-1 and 1-2 in the next column.

Arrested Individuals			
	Male	Female	Total
White	9	8	17
Black	17	4	21
Hispanic	1	0	1
Unknown	1	0	1
Total	28	12	40

Not Arrested Individuals			
	Male	Female	Total
White	9	8	17
Black	17	4	21
Hispanic	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0
Total	26	12	38

Tables 1-1 and 1-2 denote demographic information regarding participants' race and sex.

Procedures

The coding unit of analysis for this study was each Facebook user's last 10 posts and pictures that were posted prior to arrest. After the researcher received consent, up to 10 of the individual's posts and pictures before the date of arrest were coded. Although some individuals did not have 10 posts or pictures, their profile was still used, and remaining cells for coding were left blank. The five categories that posts and pictures could fall under were: conventional, unconventional, moderate, both, and cannot be determined. In order to be coded as conventional, a post or picture had to exhibit strong ties to marriage/family, military/nation, religion, activity not considered deviant, conformity to the norm of society, humanity, education, and work. For example, if an individual posted a picture of a wedding, then that picture would be coded as marriage/family. If an individual wrote a post about joining the army, then that post would be coded as military/nation. Posts expressing gratitude toward a higher being were coded as religion. A picture featuring someone at a restaurant was coded as an activity not considered deviant. People plainly smiling or posing in front of a camera were coded as conformity to the norm of society. Posts and pictures featuring one's love and care for animals was coded as humanity. Posting about being in school and obtaining a higher education was coded as education. Individuals who posted about being

at their job were coded as having ties to work. Posts and pictures that had more than one element of conventional society present within their post were coded according to which element of conventional society occurred the most, or which element of society was present first. A picture or post was labeled as unconventional if the picture or post content demonstrated opposition to any elements of strong social bonds to society. For example, posting a picture that featured individuals throwing up gang signs would be coded as unconventional. Posts and pictures were coded as cannot be determined if the post or picture did not demonstrate conventional elements of society or unconventional elements of society. For instance, if a participant posted “LMS,” then the coder coded that post as cannot be determined because the post demonstrates neither strong nor weak ties to conventional society. Researchers coded posts and pictures as moderate if the post or picture demonstrated some tie to a conventional element, but that tie was weak such as an individual posting that they hate school. A picture or post was coded as both if it showed both elements of conventional society and unconventional society concurrently. For example, if an individual posted about spending time with family, but also getting into a fight and being arrested that same day, then that post would be coded as both.

Coding was completed by one undergraduate student and by one professor at Winthrop University. The professor was blind to the arrest status of the participants. Disagreement with regards to coding was resolved through discussion between the two coders.

Two researchers coded the posts and pictures based on whether they reflected conventional (mainstream) or unconventional (alternative) social connections. Social bond theory states that individuals who have weak bonds to conventional society are more likely to engage in deviant behavior (Hirschi, 1969). Coding pictures and posts based on conventional social connections showed support for the Social Bond Theory. Differential Association Theory states that an

individual learns the attitudes, techniques, and motivations of deviant behavior through interactions with others (Sutherland, 1947). Posts and pictures coded for unconventional social connections showed support for Differential Association Theory. The pictures and posts were classified according to Hirschi’s (1969), Sampson and Laub’s (1990), and Salvatore and Taniguchi’s (2012) categorical elements of social bonds to conventional society. The previous research of Sampson and Laub (1990), and Salvatore and Taniguchi (2012) have shown that specific institutions like family, marriage, work, higher education, and religion have a stronger effect on the likelihood of not committing deviant act than other institutions, so we examined them.

RESULTS

Conventionality of posts and pictures were examined using chi-square analysis. The number of likes received for posts and pictures were examined using ANOVA. Pictures were also analyzed for the number of subjects featured in them.

Posts

Arrested and not arrested participants differed in the conventionality of posts, $\chi^2(4, N = 690) = 22.72, p = .001$. As shown in Table 2-1, the not arrested group had a significantly larger proportion of conventional posts (61.7%) than the arrested group (38.3%), which supported the Social Bond Theory. In contrast, the arrested group had a significantly larger proportion of unconventional posts (63.1%) than the not arrested group (36.9%), showing support for Differential Association Theory (refer to Table 2-1).

The effect was driven by the type of conventional posts, $\chi^2(7, N = 301) = 12.74, p = .08$. Arrested individuals posted marginally more posts about family and marriage ($N = 21$) than not arrested individuals ($N = 13$), as seen in Table 2-2. Referring to Table 2-2, there was no significant difference between arrested individuals and not arrested individuals for the remaining post categories.

There was a significant difference with arrest status and post content likes, $\chi^2(4, N = 690) = 3.09, p = 0.15$ (refer to Table 2-3). Table

2-3 shows that the arrested group ($M = 9.00$) had significantly less likes for conventional posts than the not arrested group ($M = 12.43$), providing evidence for Differential Association Theory. Additionally, the arrested group ($M = 8.44$) had significantly less likes for posts labeled as both than the not arrested group ($M = 17.80$) as shown in Table 2-3.

Pictures

As with posts, we also examined the conventionality of pictures. There was no significant difference for picture category when examining arrest status, $\chi^2(9, N = 617) = 14.10, p = .12$ (see Table 2-2). Conformity to the norm of society was the most common category in which the pictures of arrested individuals ($N = 204$) and not arrested individuals ($N = 200$) were coded as in Table 2-2. The least common category of pictures posted by arrested individuals ($N = 1$) and not arrested individuals ($N = 1$) was work, as seen in Table 2-2. Concurrently, the nation category was also the least common category of which arrested ($N = 1$) and not arrested ($N = 1$) individuals posted pictures about (refer to Table 2-2).

Arrested individuals and not arrested individuals differed significantly with regards to the number of people featured in a picture, $\chi^2(3, N = 703) = 24.81, p < .001$, showing support for Social Bond Theory. Arrested individuals had significantly fewer group photos ($N = 33$) than not arrested individuals ($N = 83$) as shown in Table 2-4.

Table 2-1
Relationship between Arrest Status and Conventionality of Posts and Pictures.

Conventionality	Posts		Pictures	
	Arrested	Not Arrested	Arrested	Not Arrested
Conventional	36.8%(114)*	48.4%(184)*	83.6%(291)	93.5%(332)
Unconventional	17.1%(53)*	8.2%(31)*	8.0%(19.3)	3.1%(11)
Moderate	3.9%(12)	2.6%(10)	0.6%(2)	0.0%(0)
Both	8.1%(25)	3.9%(15)	1.7%(6)	0.0%(0)
Cannot Determine	34.2%(106)	36.8%(140)	6.0%(21)	3.4%(12)

* $p < .05$.

Table 2-2
Relationship between Arrest Status and Types of Conventional Posts and Pictures.

Categories of Conventionality	Posts		Pictures	
	Arrested	Not Arrested	Arrested	Not Arrested
Work	5.2%(6)	8.1%(15)	0.3%(1)	0.3%(1)
Education	2.6%(3)	6.5%(12)	0.0%(0)	2.5%(8)
Humanity	5.2%(6)	6.5%(12)	2.4%(7)	2.2%(7)
Conformity to the norm	27.6%(32)	22.7%(42)	69.6%(204)	61.7%(200)
Nation & Military	3.4%(4)	4.3%(8)	1.0%(3)	1.8%(6)
Family & Marriage	18.1%(21)*	7.0%(13)*	11.9%(35)	10.8%(35)
Activity not considered deviant	31.0%(36)	35.7%(66)	14.0%(41)	19.8%(64)
Religion	6.9%(8)	9.2%(18)	0.7%(2)	0.9%(3)

* $p < .10$.

Table 2-3
Relationship between Arrest Status, Post Content Likes, and Conventionality of Posts.

Conventionality	Post Content Likes	
	Arrested	Not Arrested
Conventional	9.00	12.43
Unconventional	7.91	5.55
Moderate	16.08*	9.30*
Both	8.44*	17.80*
Cannot Determine	9.09	6.84

* $p < .05$.

Table 2-4
Relationship between Arrest Status and Number of People in a Posted Picture.

Number of People	Pictures	
	Arrested	Not Arrested
No People	8.9%(31)	6.8%(24)
One Person	57.2%(199)	49.0%(174)
Couple	24.4%(85)	20.8%(74)
Group	9.5%(33)*	23.4%(83)*

* Significant $p \leq .05$.

DISCUSSION

Overall— what was found

The present study examined the differences in Facebook posts and pictures of individuals who had and had not been arrested in Rock Hill, SC during the year 2016. Our results show that the difference in conventionality of posts supported both Social

Bond Theory and Differential Association Theory.

There was no difference in conventionality of pictures posted by arrested and not arrested individuals, but there was a difference in the number of people featured in pictures posted with arrested individuals having fewer group photos than not arrested individuals. These results might indicate that not arrested individuals spend time with others building strong bonds through conventional activities, which supports Social Bond Theory; as a result of building strong bonds, not arrested individuals may feel more comfortable showing their involvement in those activities online. Alternatively, arrested individuals posting less group photos might mean that this group of individuals may not have strong bonds to conventional society, and thus do not engage in group activities that reflect such on Facebook.

DAT

Arrested individuals posting more unconventional posts than not arrested individuals supported Differential Association Theory because arrested individuals tended to post about ties or interactions with other like-situated people doing unconventional things (Sutherland & Cressy, 1947).

SBT

Not arrested individuals posting more conventional posts than arrested individuals demonstrates that Social Bond Theory was present throughout Facebook posts because the strong ties to conventional society were posted about, and Social Bond Theory states that strong ties to elements of conventional society predict less deviant behavior (Hirschi, 1969).

Although not arrested individuals posted significantly more conventional posts than arrested individuals as a whole, arrested individuals posted more about having strong ties to the conventional elements of family and marriage, which debunks Social Bond Theory. In order to understand reasons why the arrested group posted more about family and marriage, the ages of this group were looked into, and compared with national statistics. According to the Population Reference Bureau, the average age for women and men to become married is 27.3 and 28.8 respectively (Population

Reference Bureau). Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) cites the average age for having one's first born child is 26.3 (Matthews & Hamilton, 2016). The average age of the overall arrested sample was 24.9, while the average age of arrested individuals posting about marriage and family was 27.3. Since the age of the sample with regards to talking about family and marriage fits relatively in line with when the national average for both of these events occur, it is probable that the arrested group posting more on these topics reflects more about the age of the sample, as opposed to possible ties to conventional society.

Limitations

While the study was able to fulfill its major objectives, some limitations did occur. For instance, the size of the sample limited the researchers' abilities to clearly tell if the quality of bonds to specific conventional factors like marriage and family or employment and education predict deviant behavior, much like Social Bond Theory says it does. An additional limitation to this study was that the ages of the arrested individuals and the not arrested individuals were not able to be compared because demographic information about the not arrested individuals came strictly from Facebook. Without the ages of individuals in the arrested group, there was no way to compare both groups when examining conventional elements in society.

Conclusion

The methodology utilized in this study adds to the literature because Facebook, like other social networking sites, is a forum where people can post pictures and ideas for the world to see, that demonstrates not only their thoughts, but their character as well. By examining posts and pictures individuals upload, researchers are able to distinguish the strength of bonds (strong or weak) to types of institutions (work, higher education, family) that an individual has, and use that information to inform policies in relation to individuals who are arrested.

In conclusion, the current study shows that arrest status is related to the conventionality of posts and pictures that one chooses to upload to Facebook, and that pictures especially

indicate the types of bonds one has to society. However, the categorical element marriage and family was posted more about by the arrested group, indicating that age plays a factor in what institutions people deem more important at certain times in their life. The current study points to the need for more research on what prevents individuals from committing deviant acts, and how that research can be used to benefit at-risk populations. Interventions that focus on strengthening bonds to conventional society benefit not only those who get arrested, but their family and community as well.

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