POSITIVE DEVIANCE AND SOCIAL BOND THEORY

Melanie Wolfzorn and Alex Heckert, Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Druann Maria Heckert, Fayetteville State University

Unlike negative deviants, positive deviants have been infrequently examined empirically. Further, traditional deviance/criminology theory – developed with negative deviants/criminals as the model – has not been utilized to assess whether it is salient in explaining positive deviants. Thus, this study focuses on a group of positive deviants, abstainers or near-abstainers, from criminal activity. Utilizing mixed methodology, this group was studied empirically in relation to social bond theory. Additionally, based on the qualitative interviews, three other factors emerged as salient in promoting positive deviance: guilt, self-assurance in self-identity, and lack of motivation.

Positive deviance is a relatively new concept that is generating increasing attention across disciplines. For example, research in the area of nutritional studies is empirically examining what factors are associated with positive deviance, defined as children who thrive under the worst nutritional conditions (Zeitlin 1991; Zeitlin, Ghassemi, & Mansour 1990). Importantly, nutritional interventions based on positive deviance research have been found to be more successful than interventions based on traditional research (Dorsey 2000; Kumar Range, Naved, & Bhattarai 1997). Other disciplines, including public health (Babalola, Awasum, and Quenum-Renaud 2002), organizational research (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn 2003; Wright 2003), criminology (Piquero, Brezina, & Turner 2005; Brezina & Piquero 2004), psychology, and educational research (Robinson & Fields 1983; Werner & Smith 1989; Garmezy 1991; Howard & Dryden 1999) have also empirically studied positive deviance or related concepts (e.g., delinquency abstainers, resiliency, invulnerable children, positive cases, and the like).

Within sociology, while work on positive deviance has been primarily conceptual and theoretical, there have been a few empirical studies of positive cases, such as gifted children (Huryn 1986), artists (Heckert 1989), athletes (Ewald 1981; Ewald & Jiobu 1985), and ex-deviants (Brown 1991). Nonetheless, some of this research has not been conceptualized with a positive deviance framing. In a recent example, Irwin (2003) described elite tattoo collectors as both positive and negative deviants depending upon the social context.

In criminology, theoretical discussion and limited empirical research (Piquero et al 2005; and Brezina & Piquero 2004) have been focused on delinquency abstainers. Typically constituting about six to twelve percent of the respondents in general national surveys of juveniles, abstainers are those individuals who self-report no delinquency involvement. Some scholars have assumed that a certain level of deviance is normal and thus have "pathologized" abstainers as suffering from character flaws – neurosis, maladjustment, ineptness, moroseness and over-control – that make them unattractive to their peers (Moffitt, Caspi, Dickson, Silva, & Stanton 1996). Recent quantitative research challenges these negative assumptions of abstainers, or positive deviants. Piquero et al (2005) found that delinquency abstainers are not socially isolated or universally unhappy. Although abstainers are less likely to spend time with delinquent peers or to be involved in the typical teen social scene, Piquero et al (2005) found that abstainers were not socially isolated and instead were involved with peer groups, albeit peer groups comprised of other abstainers. Abstainers are also less likely to be sad or depressed than other juveniles. Brezina and Piquero (2004), moreover, found that having strong moral beliefs opposing delinquent behavior was strongly associated with abstention.

We contend that the field of deviance is ripe for studies that explore the concept of positive deviance in relation to traditional theories of negative deviance. Such research could potentially accomplish a number of objectives: suggest potential gaps and revisions to prevailing theories, complement the emerging criminology literature pertaining to delinquency abstainers, and as Ben-Yehuda (1990) has suggested, open up entirely new thinking and theorizing within the sociology

of deviance.

Social bond theory is one of the dominant theories of deviance and crime and emphasizes the importance of attachments to conventional society (Hirschi 1969). The role of attachments or lack of attachments in producing underconformity (delinquency and crime) and overconformity (abstention) is a potentially fruitful area of inquiry. Accordingly, in this study, we conduct qualitative interviews to explore the nature of social bonds as experienced by positive deviants or abstainers and "near abstainers."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Bond Theory

Bond theory – as a social control theory – maintains that all individuals have the same impulses to deviate (cf., Reiss 1951; Nye 1958; Reckless 1967). Most people, however, resist this inclination due to the fear of being rejected by society (Agnew 1993). When the social aspect of self is not well developed, deviance will occur (Ashley & Orenstein 1998) as a person detached from society is more prone to deviate. Durkheim (1963) argued that society and the morals and beliefs of society must have the authority to limit the wants of individuals. Durkheim (1972) noted that if society does not succeed in gaining the respect of an individual, then he or she will be unable to limit his or her own desires. A socially unattached person is more vulnerable to non-conformity.

In social bond theory, the most influential of control theories, Hirschi (1969) maintained that individuals have desires to deviate and that delinquency occurs in the context of an individual tenuously bonded to society. He outlined four constructs that constitute the social bonding: attachment to significant others, commitment to conventionality, involvement in conforming activities, and belief in conventional values. Empirical support for social bond theory has generally been supportive, although the correlations have generally been modest or low (Akers & Sellers 2004) and some research contradicts the theory. For example, individuals who are strongly attached to deviant friends or parents are more likely to be deviant (Conger 1976; Jensen & Brownfield 1983; Kandel & Davies 1991; Sampson & Laub 1993; Warr 2002), and elements of the social bond may be more predictive of minor delinquency than serious delinquency (Krohn & Massey 1980).

Social bond theory has focused on explaining negative actors (Hirschi 1969). Examining positive deviants would provide a striking and interesting contrast by which to illuminate social bond theory.

Positive Deviance

An intriguing concept, positive deviance occupies contested terrain (cf., Best & Luckenbill 1982; McCaghy 1985; Sagarin 1985; Clinard & Meier 1989; Goode 1991; Best 2004). The concept of positive deviance, similar to the conception of deviance itself, has not been singularly constructed. A few idiosyncratic definitions exist (c.f., Buffalo & Rodgers 1971; Ewald 1981; Ewald & Jiobu 1985; Palmer & Humphrey 1990). Still, akin to the substantive field of deviance, two major perspectives have emerged: normative (or objectivist) and reactivist (or subjectivist). From a normative perspective, positive deviance refers to behaviors or attributes that overconform, or reach the idealized level of the norm (Sorokin 1950; Wilkins 1965; Winslow 1970). For example, Sorokin (1950) distinguished two types of deviance: the subnormal and the "supranormal." Positive deviance has also been advanced from a reactivist approach (Freedman & Doob 1968; Hawkins & Tiedeman 1975; Scarpitti & McFarlane 1975; Steffensmeier & Terry 1975; Norland, Hepburn, & Monette 1976). From this perspective, positive deviance refers to that which has been positively evaluated and labeled. Dodge (1985) synthesized these two definitions in positing that positive deviance refers to that which overconforms and is positively evaluated.

More recently, normative and reactivist definitions of deviance have been integrated as follows: negative deviance describes underconformity (or non-conformity) that is negatively evaluated; deviance admiration denotes underconformity (or non-conformity) that is positively labeled; rate-busting suggests overconformity that produces negative reactions; and positive deviance depicts overconformity that is positively evaluated (Heckert & Heckert 2002, 2004a, 2004b).

Positive deviants have been examined from the lens of sociology. For example, Heckert (1989) examined the initial stigmatization of the French Impressionists, Huryn (1986) interviewed gifted students to identify the coping mechanisms they construct to contend with labeling, and Irwin (2003) has

examined the world of elite tattoo collectors and the differential reactions they experience. Still, empirical examination of positive deviance has been scant. Other academic disciplines are perhaps issuing a clarion call that there is much to be learned from empirically focusing on positive deviants as well as negative deviants. Clearly, more sociological study is warranted to keep abreast with trends in other disciplines.

Objectives

This study will identify positive deviants and compare their social bonds, or levels of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief to individuals identified as negative deviants. It will explore positive deviants' perceptions regarding what constrains them from deviance and the effect of social bond variables on their behavior. In addition, other salient themes that emerged during qualitative interviews will be discussed.

METHODS

This study utilized a mixed methods research design using mixed models. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) define mixed methods research as research that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the same research questions. A mixed models design, however, incorporates qualitative and qualitative methods to answer different research questions and to make different conclusions and inferences (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). We used a quantitative survey to ascertain whether there were positive deviants who self-reported that they abstained (or nearly abstained) from delinquent and deviant activities. We also used the quantitative survey to assess whether there was a statistical relationship between a social bond scale (and its subscales) and positive deviance. Through the quantitative survey, positive deviants (abstainers or near abstainers) were identified. The positive deviants were then contacted and asked to participate in a qualitative interview, which was designed to explore on a deeper level their understanding of how they felt that social bonds impact their lives and their understanding of why they faithfully abided by the law. The quantitative and qualitative sections, while complementary, were not intended to address the same questions nor to support or refute one another.

Quantitative Sample Selection

Students in freshman level classes at a medium size state university in the northeast constituted the population of this study. In the spring, 2004 semester, a cluster sample was drawn from all students attending class in courses chosen. A random sample of fifteen introductory classes was drawn and only three professors declined to participate, leaving twelve classes that were surveyed. Questionnaires were distributed to all students present in the classroom on the day selected for surveying and students enrolled in more than one participating class were instructed to complete only one survey. Students were asked to place their completed surveys in a box. A total of 375 students chose to participate.

The questionnaire included a twelve item measure of social bonds and an eleven item serious delinquency scale. To allow for follow-up interviews with positive deviants, students were requested to fill out a form with their names and contact information at the top of each survey. This form had an identifying number matched to the corresponding surveys. Upon completion of the surveys, the students were instructed to place the contact information form and completed surveys in separate boxes. They were informed that their names would only be matched to their survey if they met the qualifications for the follow-up interviews needed in the qualitative phase of the project. Students who agreed to give their names and contact information were told they would be entered into a random drawing of all participants who supplied contact information to win one of three $15 gift certificates to a local grocery store. Students were told that if they provided contact information they might be asked to agree to an interview, but that they were not obligated to participate in an interview and participation would not affect their chances of winning the gift certificates.

The self report survey is heavily dependent on the cooperation and honesty of participants. If the respondents did not answer truthfully the results will not be accurate. Because the survey deals with information and behavior that is personal and potentially sensitive, respondents may have tried to respond in ways that make them appear more or less favorable. Studies of self report delinquency surveys as a whole, however, have found that they are surprisingly reliable and tend to have

"moderate to strong" validity coefficients (Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis 1981, as cited in Empey, Stafford, & Hay 1999). The potential for interview participants to lie on the surveys was not deemed to be a serious concern for the qualitative data because, by definition, the positive deviants we were hoping to identify would answer questions honestly, provide their contact information, and should be willing to participate in interviews. During the interviews, participants who may have been misclassified as positive deviants would be able to be identified and excluded from the category of a positive deviant.

Quantitative Measurement

The two variables measured in the quantitative phase of this study were the strength of the social bond as defined by Hirschi (1969) and a serious delinquency scale modified to be appropriate for college students. The social bond index consisted of responses (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree) to twelve items that represented the four components theorized by Hirschi to be important in influencing delinquency: attachment to significant others, commitment to obtaining goals through conventional methods, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in conventional values. Attachment was operationalized by responses to three questions (currently involved in an important romantic relationship; if I knew something would disappoint my parents I would not do it; and my friends are a very important part of my life). The involvement element was operationalized with three questions pertaining to activities (between school, family, and social activities, I don't have a lot of free time; I spend a lot of time just hanging out with my friends; and I belong to a lot of social, community, or religious organizations). The commitment element was operationalized by questions pertaining to conventional goals (I would not have a lot to lose right now if I got into a lot of trouble; I feel like I have worked hard to get where I am now in life; and maintaining my reputation is very important to me). Finally, belief in conventional values was operationalized by three questions (I have a lot of respect for the police; it is all right to get around the law if you can get away with it; and it is important to me to earn the things I want in life). The bond index, an original scale for this research, was considered by a group of 4 individuals familiar with Hirschi's bond theory and it was agreed that it had face validity and that by providing 3 questions for each element, it was also agreed to have content validity (Babbie 1998). Cronbach's alpha for the overall bond scale was .6, which is on the low end of acceptability. The actual overall bond scores ranged from 21 to 46 (the theoretical range was 12 to 48), and the bond scores were normally distributed (skewness = -.06) with a mean of 36 and standard deviation of 4. Thus, on the whole, the participants were fairly well "bonded."

The serious delinquency index used to measure the level of deviance was adapted from Nye and Short's (1957) self-reported scale (Brodsky & Smitherman 1983). The questions were adapted to be more current and to be applicable to college students rather than juveniles. All of the items constitute criminal offenses. In addition, several questions measuring minor offenses were included to compensate for items that were omitted because they did not apply to young adults. The students were asked how often (none, one or two times, three or four times, five to ten times, or more than ten times) they participated in eleven criminal activities ranging from relatively minor to rather serious (driven a car without a driver's license or permit; taken little things, worth less than $2; bought or drank beer, wine, or liquor while under the legal drinking age; purposely damaged or destroyed public or private property; driven a vehicle faster than the speed limit; knowingly committed a traffic violation other than speeding; forged somebody else's signature; made anonymous phone calls just to annoy people; taken things of medium value, $2 to $50; taken things of large value, worth more than $50; and used or sold illegal drugs). Cronbach's alpha for the deviance index was .84 which indicates good internal consistency. The actual scores ranged from 11 to 55, which corresponds to the theoretical range as well. The scores were fairly normally distributed (skewness = .45) with a mean of 27.5 and standard deviation of 8.7.

Qualitative Sample Selection

For the qualitative component of the study, we employed a purposeful theory-based sample of students who responded to the quantitative survey. Once the surveys had been collected, scored, and entered into a

statistical data set, we identified positive deviants based on their scores on the delinquency checklist. Positive deviants were defined as individuals who scored between eleven and fourteen. A score of eleven meant they had not committed any of the criminal acts listed on the survey, and a score of fourteen could be obtained a number of ways (e.g., checking "one or two times" on three of the 11 items, or checking "5 to 10 times" on 1 item). Regardless, these positive deviants represented 5.3 percent of the participants and were clearly abstainers or near abstainers from crime. Our goal was to interview at least twenty positive deviants; however, only nineteen positive deviants were identified based on their criminality scores and only nine of them agreed to be interviewed. Three potential participants refused to participate and the remaining seven could not be contacted through the information provided. One of the positive deviants interviewed was dropped from the data analysis after it was determined she did not truly fit the profile of a positive deviant. An international student, it was concluded that she scored exceptionally low on her deviance survey because of cultural differences.

We also sought to interview "negative cases," (Patton 2002) defined as students who scored high on the social bond index and also scored high on the deviance index. Because Hirschi's (1969) theory would predict that participants who scored high on social bonds would have lower deviance scores, these negative cases were of particular interest. Of the four negative cases we identified, three agreed to be interviewed.

Qualitative Interviews

The components of social bond theory served as sensitizing concepts for our qualitative interviews. We conducted semi-structured interviews which focused on the participants' perceptions of how the social bond variables impact their behavior and not specifically on the actual deviant behaviors in which they may or may not have engaged. We employed a flexible emergent design that allowed the interview guide to be altered based on previous interviews and what emerged within each individual interview. Owing to the collaborative nature of the semi-structured interviews, each participant had some different specific questions, although all participants discussed common topics. The topics explored in each interview included the following: what factors most influence their decisions when they have a chance to do something that would break the law; how those factors came to be important to them; how they would feel if they did break the law (for something little and something big); how someone close to them would feel if they broke the law (little and big violations); how they felt their family and friends affected their behavior (attachment element); how they spent a typical week (involvement element); how they felt their beliefs about what is right and wrong were similar and different to those of most other people (belief element); what they defined as a goal they have in life and how they felt they would risk it if they decided to pursue that goal through unethical or illegal means and what the impact would be on their life if they lost that goal (commitment element); what people think about them because they break the law less than most people (asked of positive deviants); what they think of people who never seem to break the law (asked of negative cases); how they felt they fit into American society and what else they thought was important for the interviewer to know. The interviews were all tape recorded with the permission of the participants and notes pertaining to each interview and participant were recorded after each interview.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed by plotting and inspecting histograms and computing measures of central tendency, standard deviations, and skewness. Cronbach's alphas were computed for the bond and deviance scales. In addition, bivariate scatterplots, correlation coefficients, and regression coefficients were computed between the overall bond scores and the deviance scores, as well as between the bond subscale scores and the deviance scores.

The qualitative interviews were transcribed and each interview transcript was read several times to obtain a sense of emerging themes. In this inductive analysis phase (Patton 2002), we remained open to any important or repeating themes. After repeatedly reading through the transcripts, the first themes to emerge were the personalities of the participants, attachments to family, the beliefs of the participants, the tendency for participants to feel guilt, empathy, the pres-

Table 1: College Student Reports of Deviance and Levels of Social Bonds: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N=375)

Variables	Deviance score	Overall Bond Score	Attachment	Involvement	Commitment	Belief
1. Deviance score	-					
2. Overall bond score	-.47**	-				
3. Attachment	-.18**	.58**	-			
4. Involvement	-.28**	.62**	.10*	-		
5. Commitment	-.27**	.74**	.25**	.27**	-	
6. Belief	-.52**	.72**	.19**	.28**	.44**	-
Mean	27.5	36				
Standard Deviation	8.7	4				
Range	11-55	21-46				
Cronbach's Alpha	0.84	0.60				

*p<.05 (1-tailed)
**p<.01 (1-tailed)

sure or absence of pressure from peers for the participants to conform or not conform, and the fear the participants may or may not have had of consequences and getting caught. These themes were compiled from both the positive deviants' transcripts and that of the negative cases. To allow the first look at the data and the first thoughts regarding the themes within the data to be as neutral and open as possible, the sensitizing concepts of bond theory were not considered or actively pursued upon this first look at the data.

Following that, the data were re-examined using our sensitizing concepts, which were the elements of social bond theory (Hirschi 1969). Patton (2002) uses the term, analytic induction, to define this process of approaching qualitative data with predetermined hypotheses and assessing how the data relate to the hypotheses or specified theories. In this analytic induction phase, we looked for themes that appeared to support or refute Hirschi's (1969) bond theory. The emerging themes were then re-examined and narrowed down based on what appeared to be most relevant to the study and important to the participants themselves. The list of themes at this point became all the bond element themes (attachment, commitment, involvement and beliefs), guilt, personality, empathy, and consequences. The quotes within the transcripts were then color coded according to which salient theme, if any, they corresponded. The color coded transcripts and notes were repeatedly read again, and the final list of salient themes became those related to the bond elements, guilt (which now included the empathy quotes and theme as they appeared related to one another in the context of the transcripts), self-identity, and lack of deviance motivation (both self-identity and lack of motivation were taken as separate themes from the original "personality" theme). The theme of consequences was dropped because although it was considered salient, it overlapped with the commitment theme and the other themes appeared to be more important and relevant to the purposes of this study.

Quality and Credibility

To enhance the credibility of this work, an audit trail was maintained that contains a record of field notes, biases, and analytic choices. This audit trail will allow others who may be interested to see themes not found important enough to include in the final analysis and to see biases that may have affected decisions that were made (Patton 2002). By also interviewing the negative cases, we hoped to find data or themes that may not have been considered when this research began.

Once the qualitative data analysis section was completed, the interview participants were contacted and the findings were shared with them. They were asked to provide their feedback and further insight. Specifically, they were asked if their experiences and the themes they feel are important were related accurately. Only six of the interview participants were able to be contacted for this member check. None of these participants re-

quested any changes to the parts concerning them or questioned any of the interpretations. The members who provided specific feedback stated that they appreciated the opportunity to review the analysis and found the interpretations interesting. These member checks increased our confidence in the results and analysis of the qualitative data (Patton 2002).

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Table 1 reveals the bivariate correlations between the deviance scores, the overall social bond scores, and the separate components of the social bond. In general, the bivariate associations were weak to moderate, with beliefs having the strongest association with deviance (-.52), and the overall bond scores being moderately associated with deviance (-.47). Examination of the scatterplot (not shown) between the deviance and overall bond scores revealed a trend for the highest deviance scores to be associated with lower bond scores, but the relationship was not strong and consistent. There were definitely negative cases; there were individuals with low bond scores and low deviance scores, as well as individuals with relatively high bond scores and high deviance scores. All four specific components of the bond were highly correlated with the overall bond score, although the components were only weakly to moderately correlated with each other (from .10 to .44). Commitment and belief were moderately correlated (.44), whereas attachment was weakly correlated with involvement (.10) and belief (.19). The specific elements of the social bond appear to be somewhat independent of each other, helping to explain the relatively low alpha of .60 for the overall social bond scale.

Qualitative Results

Social Bond Elements

Attachment

Attachment is a key variable of social bond theory. To understand the importance of attachment in respondents' lives, questions were asked regarding how family and friends impacted their behavior, how a significant person in their life would feel if they broke the law, and how that would impact their choices. Primarily, respondents indicated that their behavior was affected, to some extent, by their attachment to others, but not controlled by those attachments. Generally, the positive deviants mentioned that they would not want to disappoint significant others and that their family was integral in molding them. As one participant explained:

> My family's approvals are important to me, especially my father's approval, and I know that if I were to do things that are against the law that would really make him think less of me which would really hurt me, and umm...seeing what comes from other people like, I always like people to see me as a good human being, as a right human being rather than you know someone who goes out and commits crimes...It's really important to me how other people think about me, that who are directly involved with me like family and like close friends.

As another respondent directly stated in relation to specific acts of illegal behavior:

> I always had a close relationship with my parents that I always told them what I was doing, they always asked those kind of questions....In a way, I wouldn't want to disappoint them, so I don't think I would try something like bad. Like going to parties or underage drinking, just I guess in a way that I just wouldn't want to disappoint them.

This familial influence can become internalized. According to one respondent,

> Everything that I do, I hear my mother in the back of my head that I should or shouldn't do it, even if it's something that she's never told me I shouldn't or should do. I can just imagine what she would say, so that has the biggest impact on me.

The family is clearly a potent social institution in her case and other participants reflected similar feelings.

Furthermore, respondents reported that they received support from their peers for their good behavior. As one participant related,

> I guess in high school, I remember a lot of the kids in the other cliques would always be partying and underage drinking...I mean my friends never did that, I think I was lucky to have friends that always found things to do.

Still, several reported that while this influence was important, the family was still the pivotal influence in their life. As one respondent explained:

> My family affects my behavior a lot more than my friends. I have one or two friends, if they said something to me I would really take it into consideration, but like my other friends I wouldn't care that much about what they said...My family is small, it's just me and my parents; I'm an only child. So, I really would like to make them proud. I don't make any bad decisions because I think my parents would be really disappointed in me.

Generally, the respondents felt that their families and friends supported their behavior. Still, some reported being willing to make decisions contrary to the wishes of their significant others. One participant acknowledged this situation,

> Because they are the people I care about they are the people I am around most of the time. So, naturally I would worry about what they thought of me or something I did. Up to a certain point...I was going to do what was the best thing for me regardless of what they felt.

Furthermore, and quite interestingly, various respondents reported that friends and family members were definitely not positive deviants and this scenario could also impact their choices. According to one respondent:

> Well, like my brother and sister have gotten in trouble and I saw the negative reaction that happens when you do things when you are bad and um, I just never got in trouble and I definitely saw when other people got in trouble what happens and I never had the urge to get in trouble...I don't really know, I don't know why I'm a good kid, I did not grow up in a perfect house, my parents and my sister and brother are trouble makers. I don't know.

Family and peers are influential factors. For the negative cases, attachment simply did not create rule conformity. Generally, they felt that family had been a positive impact – and felt their families would support them even in the context of negative behaviors – on their lives. Friends had been a negative impact on their choices. In contrast, positive deviants confirmed that primarily friends had been a positive impact and that they enjoyed spending time with friends similar to them. In fact, Hirschi (1969) is not supported in that everyone that was interviewed, positive or negative, had strong relationships with others. Behavior differentiated these two groups. This qualitative finding resonates with the weak quantitative correlation (-.18) between attachment and deviance for the larger sample (n = 375).

Commitment

Commitment is the second of the bonds. To ascertain the orientation of respondents to commitments, they were asked to ponder a goal in their life and the associated risk of pursuing that goal by unethical or illegal means; furthermore, they were asked to reflect on the impact that not achieving that goal would have on their lives. While both negative cases and the positive deviants similarly expressed not feeling personally satisfied if they achieved their goal through non-legitimate means, the positive deviants were less likely to be able to imagine the scenario. For example, one respondent claimed he would be "devastated" and another said that it would "destroy" his life. As expressed by one respondent,

> I don't understand why people do stuff like that, like, I don't think I ever would, but I think if I ever did I would feel horrible about it, I would feel horrible about it if I didn't get caught, I have a very guilty conscience.

Another commented:

> It would probably change the whole course of my life and what I want to do with it. I would have to restart it or find a different future...Right there I would have to give up what I love to do and want to do for something else. It means going through getting into schools with the reason for getting kicked out of the last school. It would be a bunch of stress and havoc in your life.

Positive deviants had a difficult time imagining how they would recover from the loss of the goal. All felt it would disrupt their life. As one respondent commented:

> In the end, you are going to get caught.

> That's going to be the main problem with committing something unethical. That's the main thing that could happen, you'll get caught and something bad will happen, I will never find a job, ever, ever, ever and they'll strip me of my diploma and the degree that I got. Or I'll just go to jail.

As another commented,

> I'm an education major, so anything I do or any kind of criminal record, you can't get into any school districts. So, like, even if you get an underage drinking, if you get like any kind of drugs, you can't be a teacher, so that's part of my decision.

According to another respondent,

> [It's] a big part of my life cause I mean my dad always teaches me that you need to get through school to get somewhere, I mean I haven't experienced it yet, but he's been to college so I'm guessing it would be a big impact on my life.

On the other hand, while the negative cases were in accord that losing the goal would have a significant negative impact on their lives, they were able to better imagine constructing their lives after the loss of the goal and to describe substitute goals.

Hirschi (1969) noted that those who had invested effort in college would be unlikely to risk their position as a student. Thus, commitment to pursuing education and career is one of the strongest predictors of who will or will not engage in deviant behavior (Empey et al 1999). The participants were all in college and all expressed the opinion that they would not want to be in a situation of not being able to graduate. Yet, the positive deviants had a difficult time picturing a life if they did not achieve their goal.

Involvement

Involvement is another key component of social bond theory. During the interviews, students were asked to describe a typical week in their life and present information on their various activities, including work, academics, sports, religious activities, clubs, and free time. Both positive deviants and the negative cases were busily engaged in conventional activities and both had sufficient free time to engage in unconventional activities; positive deviants just chose not to do so.

Depicting a typical week, positive deviants described themselves as attending class, working, doing homework, and spending time with friends. Various positive deviants described their life as "not very exciting" and typical leisure activities included watching television, surfing the internet, going shopping, eating out, or listening to music. One student succinctly stated,

> I am pretty boring: this will be a quick discussion.

When asked about the imagined scenario of more free time, one respondent replied,

> Probably go nuts, because I seem to have too much of it as it is...I'd rather like be doing something all the time than just having a lot of free time on my hands and sitting around doing nothing.

Another student indicated,

> I would go insane I don't know what I would do. I would probably find something to do. Maybe work more.

Other respondents suggested a similar response indicating that they did spend time alone in their dorm, watching television, reading or listening to music.

The negative cases did not seem to have more free time. Rather, they opted for different activities, including illegal drugs and underage drinking. Still, they engaged in similar conventional activities to the positive deviants. Their illegal behavior was done in conjunction to their conventional activities.

The qualitative data did not support the notion that involvement in conventional activities helps to prevent deviance. Empey et al (1999) have concluded that there is little support for involvement as a barrier to delinquency; involvement in academic activities may reduce delinquency, but the link is not strong. All of the respondents were college students; thus, all spent time on academic activities.

Belief

Belief is the final variable of the social bond theory. To assess the belief of respondents, they were asked questions regarding how they understood their beliefs about right

and wrong to be similar or different from other people, specifically including friends and family. According to Hirschi,

> We assume, in contrast, that there is a variation in the extent to which people believe they should obey the rules of society, and, furthermore, that the less a person believes he should obey the rues, the more likely he is to violate them. (1969 26)

Positive deviants would be expected to believe very strongly that they should obey the rules.

All of the respondents indicated that they felt, in general, that most people had similar beliefs about what is right and wrong. Still, as one respondent noted, the key is simply that of "just doing it." The positive deviants interviewed were more committed to following what they believe. As one respondent asserted,

> I think that's the difference between me and other people. Not necessarily the morals, or the ideas of what's right and wrong, being able or just not being able to commit a crime due to the fact that you know it isn't right. Some people are just less inhibited that way.

Another participant, when asked to reflect on why she had followed the rules of her parents in contrast to her brother and her sister, commented

> I think that we got the same concepts of right and wrong, I just followed them.

Another reflected:

> In the western world, most people know what is right and what is wrong as in what is socially acceptable. It doesn't mean that they will abide by that, but they'll know it anyway. I think most people when they are doing something wrong, they know they are doing something wrong. Whether it's just wrong, or it's against the law. Like that's what I think, that's the case. But not everyone will feel bad about it...I think that's the difference between me and many other people who are committing crimes, that those people don't have like maybe the Freudian super ego to hold them back to say that's not right. You get the point.

On the other hand, the negative cases agreed that they had the same beliefs as other people, but that they did not always do what they think is right. Still, a question emerges. If the difference between the two groups' beliefs is primarily a difference in their ability to follow through on beliefs, why are the beliefs of the positive deviants more personally constraining?

Summary of Qualitative Results for the Social Bond Components

Overall, in support of bond theory, positive deviant students did reveal a high level of attachment to others. Additionally, the positive deviants generally displayed a high level of commitment to the conventional life. Further, the positive deviants also maintained a strong orientation to belief. Regarding involvement, support was not present. Positive deviants described themselves as having more free time and less involvement in activities than the negative cases. Still, the elements of bonds were not consistently any stronger in the positive deviants than they were for other students. The survey data also indicated a moderate relationship between bond scores and deviance scores, particularly for the belief dimension. Nevertheless, the negative case analysis demonstrated that people could be very bonded and still feel free to deviate and break the law. Other factors, however, did emerge in these interviews.

Other Factors

Consistently, respondents brought up factors other than those associated with bond theory. These variables included guilt, self-identity, and a lack of motivation to deviate.

Guilt

Participants repeatedly mentioned that violating the law was not an option based on feelings – such as letting themselves down or feeling bad – that would accompany that choice. In fact, the respondents related that guilt was more consequential in shaping their choices than any potential repercussions, including formal or informal sanctions. One participant, replying to a question about how illegal drug use would make her feel, stated that her reaction would be:

> Horrible, just horrible, I, um, I guess I'm a more emotional person, I'd probably cry about it. I would just hate to feel, to know

> that I did something wrong, that I had something on my record that just shows that I'd done something wrong...Just knowing I'd done something wrong would be on my conscience and it would bother me that I'd know that I did something wrong.

Another respondent, addressing a question related to committing deviance, replied,

> I would probably really [feel] ashamed. I feel bad just thinking about it, so I guess I'd feel, like, really horrible...It's deviant, it's going against society's norms and it's just not what you're supposed to do.

In fact, all of the respondents described feeling guilty as a consequence of a hypothetical situation of committing various crimes. Thus, guilt emerges as a major molder of this group of positive deviants. For example, one student simply asserted he didn't break the law as he didn't want to feel bad about himself. For the positive deviants, even the idea of breaking a minor law – a more normative approach to youthful life – sparked feelings of guilt. Thus, these participants utilized words such as terrible, horrible, or guilty to describe how they would feel if they were to run a stop sign.

This sense of guilt was internalized and deeply embedded. The participants conveyed that their feelings of guilt were not linked to whether others knew or cared about their actions. One participant plainly stated,

> Getting caught does not matter to me. If I know I'm cheating or doing something wrong, I will feel bad about myself. Getting caught would not be a worry.

Pressed to clarify this sense of guilt, respondents delineated a combination of the following. Firstly, they worried how others might be negatively impacted by a deviant choice. For example, a respondent stated that even if nobody had been hurt, running a stop sign would make her feel really guilty, because she would imagine what could have happened if people had been hurt. Secondly, the participants, pondering on the potentiality of breaking the law, indicated that they would feel that they had been deceiving themselves and others about who they were as persons. As an example, one respondent replied,

> So, I would feel like I was deceiving myself and people that taught me that it was wrong, but society as a whole.

In contrast, the negative cases did not mention guilt, feelings of deception, potential consequences to others, or any other related phenomenon. When asked how they would feel after breaking a minor law, the responses were "Nothing," or "No different." Thus, guilt constrains the behavior of this group of positive deviants in a way not experienced by the negative cases.

Self-Identity

These participants were overwhelmingly assured of their self-identity, an identity based on their own choice to follow a stricter path in life than others. As one respondent explained

> My job on campus involves enforcing the rules. You get a lot of comments that I'm a narc, I'm a goodie two shoes. I dealt with that kind of stuff when I was younger. To me, they are just words...I'm not easily swayed, I'm not easily convinced, and I'm not easily dragged along...We were taught growing up, believe what you want but stand by it...I guess it's a little bit of determination to do what's best for me and a certain amount of stubbornness.

The respondents were so confident in their self-identity that they simply did not care if others agreed with their decisions; rather, they made their decisions to feel good within themselves. In response to a question delving into her thoughts when subjected to peer pressure, a participant stated,

> Nothing really, I just say no. I just tell them no until they give up.

As another participant confirmed, he would never break the law – despite peer pressure – because:

> I thought on occasion that that would make my life easier, but in the end it's about whether I like myself, not whether or not other people like me and there are a lot of people that don't like me. That's fine, because at least I can wake up in the morning and look in the mirror and say well, you know, I didn't do anything wrong and that's how like,

> when people indicate they don't like me, and that's fine, at least I know that I didn't do anything wrong, and that's more important to me than whether or not your going to like me, because if you do like me, your gonna like me for who I am and this is exactly who I am and this is why a lot of people respect me. This is why a lot of people respect me, you might not, but a lot of people do.

Undoubtedly, the sense of self so permeated these respondents that neither peer pressure nor stigmatization impacted their life choices. In contrast, those respondents who were not positive deviants made no comparable statements. Clearly, these positive deviants generally possessed a sense that they were not law breakers and that perception constituted a core part of their self-identities.

Motivation

A final variable that emerged was that positive deviants simply had no desire or motivation to deviate or break the law. Participants repeatedly stated that they would not enjoy breaking the law, that they had no interest in deviant behaviors, or that they just found other activities to be more fun. One respondent indicated that she would rather go to the movies or go shopping than get drunk or party or engage in one night stands. Another participant – who personally thought that smoking was gross and did not like the way beer tasted – questioned,

> Like, why would I drink if I didn't like it?

Another respondent asserted:

> Yeah, people always try to get me to drink, they think I'm being boring, and I just don't consider that fun, I would rather play games or talk or watch TV. I would rather just do something else, I don't consider sitting in a bar smoking and drinking doing something fun. I don't really, I guess it hurts me that they say they think I'm boring, but I don't let it get to me...From what I've heard, I don't know if this is stereotyping or not, but it seems that most college kids go out and get drunk every weekend and I've never had an alcoholic beverage in my entire life, so I would think I'm kinda an odd ball, but I just find other odd balls and we get along.

One respondent dismissed the claims of people that getting drunk was fun by contending that she simply thought they looked stupid; thus, she could not imagine that drinking would be a fun activity for her.

Other respondents further explained that they just did not experience the urge to break the law. On the other hand, the negative cases tended to include minor illegal behavior, such as underage drinking, in their description of what activities they engaged in for fun. Both groups were social in that they enjoyed hanging out with friends; for the negative cases, the fun included minor law violation, while for the positive deviants, the fun did not hinge on minor law violation. Overall, one factor that emerges from the case of positive deviants is that motivation for deviant behavior was not very influential in their choices.

Essentially, guilt, confidence in self-identity, and lack of motivation were three factors that were raised by the respondents. They identified these variables as critical in their decisions to constrain their own behavior. The negative cases, in contrast, did not discuss any of these factors in their interviews.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this research was to explore the social bonds of positive deviants, who are abstainers or near-abstainers from deviance. In addition, we explored positive deviants' perceptions regarding what constrained them from the "normal" commission of deviant or criminal activities. Having strong social bonds was only a weak to moderate factor in producing abstention or near abstention from deviant activities. Nevertheless, this finding does not serve as a critique of social bond theory as it was a theory developed to explain negative deviance. Strong commitment to deviance abstention and belief in not doing deviance and crime were the most important elements in deterring crime, which concurs with previous research on bond theory and delinquency abstention (Empey et al 1999; Akers & Sellers 2004; Brezina & Piquero 2004). The qualitative interviews portray a more nuanced understanding of belief. Both positive deviants and negative deviants tend to share the same beliefs, but positive deviants just express a greater ability to follow their beliefs than negative deviants. This finding supports a social learning perspective that general beliefs are

not the key to deviance abstention and commission. Rather specific beliefs, neutralization strategies, or the rewards of deviant behavior likely prevail over general beliefs in producing deviance versus deviance abstention.

Three additional factors emerged as important in promoting positive deviance. They were guilt, self-identity, and motivation. Guilt and motivation can probably best correspond with a social learning or rational choice perspective, as opposed to other deviance theories. Guilt increases the costs of criminal behavior, and lack of motivation to commit crime implies the lack of rewards perceived by positive deviants in pursuing deviance activities. Self-identity as non-deviants was an important element discussed by positive deviants. With the exception of labeling theory, prevailing theories of deviance and criminality tend not to stress the importance of self-identity (or the empirical support for self-concept and similar concepts has been weak; cf., Akers & Sellers 2004). Our study supports theoretical exploration regarding the role of positive identities in promoting deviance abstention. Deviance theory in general would benefit from exploring the utility of identity theories in explaining both deviance and deviance abstention.

None of the prevailing theories of deviance and crime provide a completely satisfactory explanation for deviance abstention. As discussed, the importance of social bonds in promoting deviance abstention was weakly supported. Social learning theory has, perhaps, the most applicability because of its emphasis on rewards and costs associated with behavioral choices. The importance of self-identity, however, is not accommodated by current renditions of social learning theory (Akers 1998; Akers & Sellers 2004). Learning theory also fails to explain why some positive deviants persist in their overconformity despite repeated sanctions that the study participants admitted were sometimes hurtful. Also, many of the positive deviants could not identify positive role models and noted that life would be easier if they lowered their high standards of behavior. Nevertheless, the ability of social learning theory to explain both deviant and conforming behaviors suggests promise as a theory that would illuminate positive deviance, with modifications.

Low self-control theory holds some appeal in explaining deviance abstention (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990). As expected according to the theory, the positive deviants revealed a high level of self-control. In addition, the positive deviants did appear to act based on long-term consequences, which is stressed by the theory. Low self-control theory, however, fails to account for the differing internal motivations of the positive deviants. As Peter, LaGrange, and Silverman (2003 437) point out, the general theory of crime describes differing motivations as "irrelevant," since the theory assumes that crime and deviance are attractive and natural, with potential benefits and pleasures for everyone. Yet, the positive deviants claimed little motivation to engage in criminal behavior. If there is little or no desire to deviate, then it does not require much self-control to abstain. The background of the positive and negative deviants, moreover, did not suggest that parenting and discipline styles experienced as children were very different or very relevant to the deviance abstention, yet Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) stressed that low self-control is primarily a product of child-rearing practices. Because our interview questions were not designed to directly explore low self-control theory, our findings are only suggestive and future research should be designed to explore the relevance of low self-control theory in explaining positive deviance and deviance abstention.

As suggested earlier, labeling theory holds promise in explaining positive deviance, although it requires revisions to accommodate positive identities as well as negative identities. The impact of social reactions and sanctions to choosing abstention from criminal behavior should be explored in future research. Do individuals get labeled for positive behavior and then does that in turn facilitate an enmeshment in the role, or a transition from primary to secondary deviance (Lemert 1951)? Can a positive behavior be considered a label and the societal reaction encourages the transition from primary deviation to secondary deviation? As Scarpitti and McFarlane noted,

> intellectuals and saints are generally evaluated positively and are rewarded for their activities, thus (hopefully again heightening the probability of future occurrence). (1975 6)

Labeling theory might illuminate positive de-

viance.

To reiterate, Ben-Yehuda (1990) has argued persuasively that studying positive deviance would benefit the field of deviance. Little sociological research, however, has focused on positive deviance or positive deviants. This study represents an initial attempt to rectify this lacuna in the sociological literature. From another discipline, as Robinson and Fields commented,

> because all the attention has been on pathology rather than resistance to pathology, invulnerable children have been overlooked. (1983 64)

An increased understanding of positive deviance would benefit the discipline. Furthermore, this research suggests that positive deviants do not need to be pathologized.

Positive deviance has begun to establish a niche in certain substantive disciplines with practical and policy implications. An example from the field of public health is to examine more efficacious ways to combat AIDS by focusing on the positive deviants (Babalola et al 2002). Perhaps, in the future, policy implications will be a potential outcome within the sociological realm. Our research identifies some ways that positive deviants define the factors that produced their outcome. Future research might further attempt to focus on this issue with the goal of establishing social policy and programs intending to help more young people avoid trouble.

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