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Differentiable Attitudes Towards Specific Crimes and Contexts: A Quantification of Neutralization Techniques

Abstract: The neutralization theory of Sykes and Matza (1957) posits that delinquent individuals attempt to continually reintegrate with society by mentally asserting that their deviant behavior is actually normative, via an excuse. Sykes and Matza gave five excuses, or techniques of neutralization: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties. Sykes and Matza were primarily concerned with the general concept of neutralization, rather than trying to understand the specific utilities of the different technique categories they labeled. The goal of this work is to determine which techniques may be most common, and under what circumstances (what crimes or deviant behaviors) neutralizations may be most effective. Using a factorial vignette survey design with a multinational sample of college students from Poland and the United States, we find neutralization utility varies by technique and circumstance, and the denial of responsibility technique is especially potent.

Słowa kluczowe: neutralizacja, usprawiedliwienie, porównawcze, międzynarodowe, przestępstwo.

Neutralization Theory

Juvenile delinquency and deviant behavior of young people are problems of all societies and have existed for centuries. Hence, it comes as no surprise that re-

searchers have advanced many theories to explain the roots of delinquent and deviant behaviors. Sutherland (1947) is an author of one of those theories, called theory of differential association. He argues that criminal behavior is learned in a process of frequent interactions with deviant individuals. Sykes and Matza also seek to find the cause of crime and deviant behavior. Following Sutherland (1947) Sykes and Matza proposed that delinquency – as a social behavior – is learned in the process of social interaction. Together with Sutherland they also argued that learning involves “motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes favorable to violation of law” (Sutherland 1947).

Sykes and Matza (1957) theorize that delinquents generally believe in norms of their communities as is suggested by the guilt and shame expressed by juveniles who violated norms or went against beliefs. Hence, would-be delinquents must find ways to neutralize the guilt and protect themselves if they choose to participate in delinquent behavior. The best way to do it and to get relief from moral constraints is by using techniques of neutralization. Those techniques are learned through interaction with other people. In short, techniques of neutralization are justifications which juveniles use to escape society’s controls by assuring themselves of the appropriateness of an impending deviant behavior. That makes them free to engage in delinquent behavior. In the book “Delinquency and Drift,” Matza (1964) explains that neutralization allows people to drift back and forth between delinquent and conventional behavior or between freedom and restraint. This so called ‘drift’ simply enables moves from one extreme behavior to another. Drift is possible because neutralization techniques block social and internal controls what allow individuals to engage in delinquency without serious damage to their self-image.

Sykes and Matza (1957) established five major techniques of neutralization, each with a underlying motive, which can justify delinquent action and remove feelings of blame:

- 1) Denial of Responsibility: reflects individuals’ beliefs that they are not personally responsible for any delinquent behaviors because these behaviors are accidental or due to forces beyond their control. They see themselves as victims of circumstance outside their control. For example: I didn’t make the choice to commit crime; circumstances force me into it.
- 2) Denial of Injury: centers on the injury or harm involved in the delinquent act. Individuals evaluate the wrongfulness of their decisions and may realize that their act is tolerable because nobody was injured. The decision about wrongfulness of the act is left to their free interpretation. For example: I will not hurt the store owner by robbery because his store has insurance; the people I will cheat are rich.
- 3) Denial of Victim: individuals may accept that injuries happened, but argue for their rightfulness considering the circumstances. The victim is the one who has done something wrong and the injury is the deserved punishment or retaliation. For example: The guy I will hurt is a bad guy; he has it coming.

- 4) **Condemning the Condemners:** individuals may shift the focus of attention from their own deviant acts to the motives and behavior of those who disapprove of their behaviors. For example: How can you blame me? Everyone breaks the law, and if I don't I can't earn a living.
- 5) **Appeal to Higher Loyalties:** this technique applies to individuals who aim to legitimize their behavior by arguing that they are sacrificing the demands of the larger society for the demands of the smaller social group to which they belong, like group of friends or gang. They do not necessarily reject conventional norms. They rather feel trapped between two groups of norms and have to choose one way, often at the cost of violating the law. For example: I'm doing it for my friends; I can't back down for their sake (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

By using one or more of techniques identified by Sykes and Matza (1957), the individual can convince himself or herself that what they are doing is acceptable behavior regardless of what societal norms dictate. This approach ran counter to the popular theories of crime those days. Despite that, the general concept of neutralization was utilized by key criminological theories like learning theory (Akers, 1985, p. 41), control theory (Hirschi, 1969, p. 16–34), rational choice theory (Clarke & Cornish, 1985, p. 160), and reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 97). It had an undeniable impact on understanding of juvenile delinquency and criminality.

Scully and Marolla (1984) confirmed veracity of this theory for rapists and Benson (1985) for white-collar criminals. More recently, Vieraitis, Piquero, Piquero, Tibbetts and Blankenship (2012) re-examine justifications for white-collar crime, and once again prove their validity. Research on neutralization has expanded beyond juveniles and currently is applied to all age groups. It also has grown beyond male-oriented delinquency to include females. The theory has expanded in terms of crimes covered; the theory and its immediate antecedents were first applied to gang crimes (Cohen, 1955) and street crimes Sykes and Matza (1957). Some studies have even examined the use of neutralization techniques by victims of crime (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Higginson, 1999). Gruber and Schlegelmilch (2013) investigate how likely defense mechanisms, and a more concise concept of neutralization techniques, can explain the discrepancy between societal norms and actual behavior. They concluded that, consumers do apply techniques of neutralization when engaging in an exchange relationship with companies.

Interestingly the theory has been applied to religion issues as well. Pitt's (2010) study shows that by focusing on an accused speaker deemed illegitimate — by demeaning the speakers' knowledge, morality, focus, and motivations — rather than the doctrine. The technique of neutralization is employed to remove sting of the churches' negative messages by neutralizing the moral authority of the churches' messengers. This study actually offers a new insight into how parishioners persist in religious communities in which their sexual behaviors or identities are maligned.

Seeking for an answer to ‘what motivates people to commit crimes’ resulted in development of the study of neutralizations by adding different techniques to the original list of five. For example, qualitative studies of white-collar offenders introduced new techniques including the defense of necessity, the claim of normality, and the claim of entitlement (Benson, 1985; Coleman, 2002). Studies of property offenders have added the techniques of the metaphor of the ledger (Klockars, 1974), justification by comparison and postponement (Cromwell & Thurman 2003).

Albert Bandura (1999) introduced a typology similar to neutralization, called “disengagement of moral self-sanctions” (p. 193). His (1999) techniques fall into three categories—those that help offenders evade avoid dealing morally with their own reprehensible conduct, those that help offenders disengage from the existence of the detrimental effects of their actions, and those that [in a near-total overlap with Sykes and Matza (1957)] help offenders deny the victim. Within the categories Bandura places specific disengagements – (1) moral justification, (2) palliative comparison, and (3) euphemistic labeling (a callback to the symbolic interactionist roots of neutralization) prevent offenders from owning up to their reprehensible conduct. Additionally, (4) minimizing, ignoring, or misconstruing consequences protects deviants from properly weighing the detrimental effects of potential actions, while (5) displacement of responsibility and (6) diffusion of responsibility can be used by offenders to disengage from reprehensible conduct and resulting detrimental effects at the same time. Finally, (7) dehumanization and (8) attribution of blame can be used by offenders to deny the victim (1999). The term ‘denial of victim’ was intentionally mixed into this explanation of Bandura’s system to highlight its innate association with neutralization. Bandura’s schema, independently developed from Sykes and Matza (1957), highlights a broad desire for a compartmentalized neutralization-like framework.

Following described trend to improve causal models of both criminal behavior and desistance from the same, this study chooses college students from Poland and the United States of America as research participants. This study sample was selected based on the participants’ traditional non-association with significant forms of deviance. The present study is concerned with the pathways associated with willingness to commit crime, not crime itself. Assessing neutralizations used by delinquent subjects runs the risk of actually assessing after-the-fact rationalizations. In this study, researchers are interested in which neutralizations are college students most likely to endorse, and for which crimes.

Study Purpose

The current study aims to explore differences in usage or persuasiveness for neutralization techniques within and among crimes and other deviant behaviors. Data

from Poland and the United States is included in order to reduce external validity concerns. Descriptive statistics are discussed, factor analysis is used to determine the patterns by which a wide variety of neutralization types group together, and negative binomial regression is conducted to clarify the relationship between neutralizations associated with hypothetical future crimes and actual deviant behavior.

Research Design

In this research quantitative methods was used, and survey as a strategy of inquiry. Based on the original fivefold neutralization typology by Sykes and Matza (1957) and the eight Part I crimes associated with the United States' Uniform Crime Reports¹, as well as the identification of four acts associated with minor deviance (sexting², buying alcohol for minors, taking others' prescription drugs, and cheating on tests). The survey instrument is built on 4-point Likert scale (called a "forced choice" method as the neutral option is not available), to which various offenses and deviant behaviors, an five techniques of neutralization by Sykes and Matza are assigned. The survey instrument included sixty hypothetical scenarios combining of the twelve crime/deviant behavior types with each of the five neutralization prompts³. Respondents were asked to rate each of the sixty interactions in terms of how likely they would be to hypothetically commit such behavior. Separately, for the four acts of minor deviance, respondents were also asked to rate how frequently they normally engaged in such behaviors. Data were collected in 2013.

Participants

This study relied on a non-random sample of 833 college students from two countries: Poland ($N = 419$) and the United States ($N = 414$). The sample was conveniently drawn from one Polish and one US institution of higher learning, both located in areas with similar regional histories. Purposive quota sampling of classes was used at the Polish institution in order to obtain a sample of similar size to that obtained in the United States.

The Polish portion of the sample was composed of 343 females (84.5%) as well as 58 males (14.3%). The remainder either identified solely as transgender (2 respondents) or did not identify a gender. The respondents aged from 18 to

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¹ The Uniform Crime Reports crimes include motor vehicle theft, larceny, burglary, assault, arson, robbery, rape, and murder.

² For the purpose of this research sexting means sending erotic messages via phone or Internet, especially sending one's own naked pictures.

³ The survey instrument is available in English and Polish.

54 years. The modal age was 20, and the large majority of the Polish portion of the sample (91.0%) was 30 years of age or less.

The U.S. sample (414 respondents) was composed of 180 females (47.2%) as well as 200 males (52.5%). The remainder either identified solely as transgender (1 respondent) or did not identify a gender (33 respondents). The respondents aged from 18 to 45 years. The modal age was 21, and the large majority of the U.S sample (98.3%) was 30 years of age or less.

Procedure

A 64-item paper questionnaire⁴ was used to assess 833 college students in 2013 on the extent to which they would be hypothetically willing to enact scenarios of crime or crime-related behavior (60 scenarios in 60 items) and how frequently they actually engaged in minor acts of deviance (4 items) at the time they participated in the survey. Responses ranged from 1: Very Likely to 4: Very Unlikely for the crime scenarios, and 1: Every Chance I Get to 4: Never for the minor acts of deviance. A sample question is as follows, assessing motor vehicle theft and denial of responsibility:

How likely would you be to steal a motor vehicle, such as a car, if circumstances forced you?

<i>Very Likely</i>	<i>Likely</i>	<i>Unlikely</i>	<i>Very Unlikely</i>
1	2	3	4

The paper questionnaires were administered in Polish in Poland, and in English in the United States. Three types of questionnaires were distributed in both countries, varying only in terms of question order. For the study, a group of academics and credentialed collaborators administered the questionnaire during class periods. These administrators were provided with the necessary training and obtained permission from their respective agencies. The research was conducted with approval from the authors' institution's ethics committee (Institutional Review Board at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell). The respondent assessments were conducted after obtaining consent from both the respondents and instructors associated with the co-opted class time.

Results

The table below showcases distributions associated with Polish and U.S. student responses when presented with neutralization questions related to Motor Vehicle

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⁴ The questionnaire can be obtained by contacting one of the authors of the paper.

Theft in the context of the neutralization techniques Denial of Responsibility, Denial of Injury, and Condemnation of Condemners. Due to space limitations, table 1 presents data on one crime only (motor vehicle theft), however analysis introduces data on other crimes and deviant behaviors as well.

A pilot test with a small number of respondents was initially carried out to ascertain whether the items would be understood and correctly interpreted. No significant amendments were made on the final version of the questionnaire. The cases in the pilot study were not included in the full sample.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the frequencies of selected items from the hypothetical crime scenario portion of the questionnaire. Polish and US frequencies are presented separately. Table 1 is indicative of the general pattern found in frequencies across items. Several percent of respondents routinely indicated they were likely or very likely to engage in criminal behavior when presented with a neutralization justification for doing so.

Table 1. The frequency distribution of the hypothetical use of selected techniques of neutralization in the case of vehicle theft

Poland – Motor Vehicle Theft; Denial of Responsibility					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very likely	21	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Likely	90	21.5	21.6	26.7
	Unlikely	153	36.5	36.8	63.5
	Very unlikely	152	36.3	36.5	100.0
	Total	416	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.7		
TOTAL		419	419	100.00	
Poland – Motor Vehicle Theft; Denial of Injury					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very likely	18	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Likely	54	12.9	13.0	17.4
	Unlikely	124	29.6	30.0	47.3
	Very unlikely	218	52.0	52.7	100.0
	Total	414	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	5	1.2		
TOTAL		419	100.0		

Poland – Motor Vehicle Theft; Condemnation of Condemners					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very likely	3	.7	.7	.7
	Likely	18	4.3	4.3	5.1
	Unlikely	108	25.8	26.0	31.1
	Very unlikely	286	68.3	68.9	100.0
	Total	415	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.0		
TOTAL		419	100.0		
US Motor Vehicle Theft; Denial of Injury					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very likely	6	1.4	1.5	1.5
	Likely	18	4.3	4.4	5.9
	Unlikely	64	15.5	15.6	21.5
	Very unlikely	321	77.5	78.5	100.0
	Total	409	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	5	1.2		
TOTAL		414	100.0		
US Motor Vehicle Theft; Denial of Responsibility					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very likely	26	6.3	6.3	6.3
	Likely	89	21.5	21.5	27.8
	Unlikely	81	19.6	19.6	47.5
	Very unlikely	217	52.4	52.5	100.0
	Total	413	99.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.2		
TOTAL		414	100.0		

A broad trend can be seen across countries and neutralization techniques, whereby students are more likely to report lower levels of criminal inclination ('unlikely' and 'very unlikely') than higher levels of criminal inclination ('very likely' and 'likely'). However, across neutralization types, as much as a quarter of supposedly law abiding students show criminal willingness (checking the 'very likely' or 'likely' categories), and denial of responsibility seems to be an especial-

ly potent excuse in both Poland and the United States. The trend is especially noticeable when attention is given to one of the most serious crime, which is murder.

There were five items associated with hypothetical murder on the questionnaire. A large proportion of Polish respondents (84.2%) stated that they would be very unlikely to engage in murder justifying their action by shifting the focus of attention from their own criminal behavior to the motives and behavior of those who disapprove of their behaviors (condemnation of condemners justification). Precisely 78.6% indicated that is very unlikely to engage in murder while justifying their act by minimalizing or negating the injury (denial of injury), 77.6% by appealing to higher loyalties, 75% by using denial of victim technique, and 74.5% using denial of responsibility technique. The largest number of participants would justify murder using denial of responsibility technique (very likely 1.2% and likely 7%). Less people (respectively 1% and 6.2%) would use denial of victim technique. To sum up, based on data collected in Poland can be concluded that condemnation of condemners justification was consistently the least persuasive rationale for murder across all neutralization types, while denial of responsibility was the most likely to be used.

In the US data, hypothetical murders followed a similar pattern. 87.4% respondents indicated they were very unlikely to engage in murder under the condemnation of condemners justification but a smaller percentage claimed they were very unlikely to engage in murder under the denial of responsibility justification (60.6%). A small percent of US respondents indicated there were likely or very likely to engage in murder under the condemnation of condemners justification (1.9%), but more than ten times as many indicated they were likely or very likely to engage in murder under a denial of responsibility justification (19.8%). Just as with the Polish data, the dichotomy in US data between denial of responsibility and condemnation of condemners is particularly notable.

Hypothetical cheating on tests, a wildly less severe deviant act than murder, displayed a similar ordinal ranking of neutralization justifications. Within the Polish data, a moderate proportion of respondents indicated they would be very unlikely to engage in test cheating under the condemnation of condemners justification (28.9%), while the proportion of respondents who rated themselves very unlikely to engage in test cheating under the denial of responsibility justification was more than three times smaller (7.9%). A majority of Polish respondents (76.9%) rated themselves very likely or likely to cheat under the neutralization denial of responsibility, but far less (44.4%) rated themselves likely or very likely under the neutralization condemnation of condemners.

In the US data, test cheating follows the pattern seen constantly above. A moderate proportion of US respondents indicated they would be very unlikely to engage in test cheating under the condemnation of condemners justification (49.5%), while the proportion of respondents who rated themselves very unlikely

to engage in test cheating under denial of responsibility stands at (28.7%). This difference, while not showing the whole magnitude of separation seen in the Polish data, is almost as large in terms of percentage points. A plurality of US respondents rated themselves likely to cheat under the neutralization denial of responsibility (29.0%), but the very likely and likely test cheating categories for condemnation of condemners combined do not equal or exceed the prior value (24.9%).

A battery of paired samples t-tests shows that all differences between the distributions of the hypothetical crime scenario variables explored in the paragraphs above are significant to the .000 alpha level, as are the differences between the distributions of every pair of hypothetical crime scenario variables so far tested in the dataset.

Factor Structure

To determine which of the sixty hypothetical deviant act scenarios would best vary together, exploratory factor analyses were used separately for both the Polish and US portions of the dataset. The extraction method employed for the tests was principle component analysis, and the rotation method used was Varimax with Kaiser normalization. For the Polish data, thirteen factors were extracted, each explaining between 10.2% and 2.3% of the variance, and for the US data, twelve factors were extracted, each explaining between 9.0% and 4.4% of the variance. The first six factors from the rotated component matrixes for Poland and the United States, respectively, are excerpted as Table 2. For the purposes of analysis, in line with a previous factor analysis study of neutralization, only loadings above .35 will be interpreted (Li & Wu, 2012).

Table 2. Polish and US Rotated Component Matrix Excerpt

Components	Polish Components						United States Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vehicle Denial of R	-.036	.145	.106	.057	.055	.139	.793	.095	.144	.000	.000	.027
Vehicle Denial of I	.296	.141	.191	.155	.136	.129	.345	.201	.448	.080	.013	.143
Vehicle Denial of V	.360	.200	.131	.217	.221	.072	.290	.227	.370	.059	.004	.167
Vehicle C of C	.526	.286	.065	.106	.218	-.039	.063	.495	.342	.072	.006	.178
Vehicle AHL	.133	.110	.136	.051	.064	.180	.265	.141	.225	.121	-.020	.150

Components	Polish Components						United States Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Larceny Denial of R	.131	.111	.148	.071	.124	.063	.750	.085	.054	.143	.156	.138
Larceny Denial of I	.080	.097	.086	.040	.124	.068	.233	.191	.173	.112	.101	.192
Larceny Denial of V	.426	.096	.103	.132	.136	.077	.166	.062	.120	.100	.175	.168
Larceny C of C	.657	.214	.112	.156	.100	.048	.078	.167	.225	.175	.211	.157
Larceny AHL	.298	.072	.110	.015	.169	.096	.227	.148	-.001	.174	.157	.146
Burglary Denial of R	.205	.092	.148	.059	-.007	.118	.788	.013	.237	.057	.075	.070
Burglary Denial of I	.584	.161	.198	.107	-.036	.136	.264	.144	.562	.063	.097	.091
Burglary Denial of V	.598	.151	.183	.213	.062	.123	.212	.175	.483	.040	.078	.129
Burglary C of C	.714	.235	.171	.211	.057	.069	.095	.195	.646	.007	.113	.068
Burglary AHL	.328	.114	.219	.092	.058	.132	.277	.257	.322	.141	.086	.070
Assault Denial of R	-.004	.270	.112	.186	.132	.105	.634	.035	-.011	.041	.075	.015
Assault Denial of I	.378	.251	.130	.233	.194	.128	.086	.085	.305	.077	.062	.074
Assault Denial of V	.252	.246	.116	.192	.216	.092	.155	.110	.148	.126	.109	.183
Assault C of C	.595	.397	.118	.163	.167	.108	.018	.258	.336	.033	.084	.103
Assault AHL	.141	.194	.063	.190	.182	.079	.163	-.005	.024	.113	.094	.055
Arson Denial of R	.228	.103	.112	.193	.104	.033	.744	.191	.294	.079	.100	.054
Arson Denial of I	.565	.075	.041	.249	.101	.074	.177	.219	.756	.062	.113	.068
Arson Denial of V	.520	.144	.129	.285	.101	.101	.177	.250	.621	.091	.124	.112
Arson C of C	.695	.222	.172	.208	.147	.035	.107	.441	.664	.065	.116	.103
Arson AHL	.332	.184	.024	.148	.100	.076	.270	.200	.387	.071	.097	.023
Robbery Denial of R	.041	.194	.142	.083	.070	.134	.737	.049	.032	.126	.038	.088
Robbery Denial of I	.326	.165	.173	.134	.049	.140	.174	.146	.250	.043	.035	.168

Components	Polish Components						United States Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Robbery Denial of V	.394	.207	.079	.201	.120	.079	.195	.113	.194	.097	.076	.181
Robbery C of C	.572	.240	.177	.218	.103	.014	.042	.323	.297	.061	.075	.132
Robbery AHL	.203	.215	.111	.025	.129	.134	.242	.196	.151	.098	.053	.145
Rape Denial of R	.072	.113	.134	.808	.109	-.001	.383	.706	.098	.063	.049	.019
Rape Denial of I	.182	.097	.100	.830	.090	-.012	.032	.805	.092	.060	.100	.073
Rape Denial of V	.241	.232	.139	.712	.114	-.016	-.002	.720	.265	.020	.061	.019
Rape C of C	.357	.257	.229	.713	.121	-.026	.015	.832	.209	.013	.155	.073
Rape AHL	.153	.144	.122	.790	.157	.052	.116	.800	.119	.034	.069	.036
Murder Denial of R	.094	.806	.064	.128	.068	-.011	.623	.054	-.022	.016	-.006	.066
Murder Denial of I	.231	.771	.020	.159	.139	.039	.119	.180	.196	.020	.055	.136
Murder Denial of V	.210	.742	.034	.177	.153	.090	.159	.143	.156	.073	.077	.129
Murder C of C	.330	.787	.101	.193	.071	.036	.016	.199	.302	.046	.066	.077
Murder AHL	.176	.702	.007	.141	.002	.032	.172	.079	.117	.042	-.001	.096
Sexting Denial of R	-.002	.054	.819	.193	.054	.020	.341	.064	-.049	.198	.115	.058
Sexting Denial of I	.099	.012	.867	.105	.092	.019	.045	.023	.064	.134	.129	.130
Sexting Denial of V	.160	.010	.781	.087	.100	-.004	.010	.088	.111	.132	.139	.136
Sexting C of C	.321	.120	.804	.153	-.025	.015	.003	.054	.139	.166	.165	.070
Sexting AHL	.064	.031	.846	.067	.041	.042	.152	.155	.006	.159	.130	.115
Alcohol Denial of R	.012	.079	.110	.097	.810	.249	.311	.079	.019	.787	.190	.157
Alcohol Denial of I	.047	.083	.127	.070	.804	.332	.041	.019	.080	.874	.173	.212
Alcohol Denial of V	.111	.134	.029	.160	.819	.246	.043	.023	.072	.847	.140	.209
Alcohol C of C	.349	.079	.043	.148	.716	.176	.011	.047	.045	.805	.167	.146
Alcohol AHL	.093	.105	.021	.194	.730	.305	.053	.049	.014	.812	.195	.224

Components	Polish Components						United States Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Other's Rx Denial of R	-.020	.045	.041	.067	.083	.145	.377	.061	-.016	.171	.746	.132
Other's Rx Denial of I	.028	.012	.031	.069	.075	.169	.049	.049	.094	.196	.867	.122
Other's Rx Denial of V	.126	.073	.054	.002	.172	.193	.025	.070	.110	.211	.869	.137
Other's Rx C of C	.366	.108	.058	-.002	.216	.140	-.038	.148	.155	.170	.811	.161
Other's Rx AHL	.174	.020	.051	.035	.166	.166	.082	.137	.039	.151	.748	.162
Cheating Denial of R	-.045	.077	.044	-.052	.173	.815	.348	.073	.017	.234	.159	.784
Cheating Denial of I	.029	.036	-.020	.013	.155	.833	.052	.019	.109	.196	.114	.842
Cheating Denial of V	.047	.009	-.042	-.022	.242	.831	.049	.024	.074	.212	.164	.847
Cheating C of C	.311	.048	.069	.058	.244	.714	.122	-.087	.022	-.022	-.007	.022
Cheating AHL	.045	-.014	.054	.021	.229	.781	.188	.073	.076	.036	.165	.078

Table 2 Abbreviation Key: R = Responsibility, I = Injury, V = Victim, C of C = Condemnation of Condemners, AHL = Appeal to Higher Loyalties, Vehicle = Motor Vehicle Theft, Sexting = sending pornographic images of self via phone, Alcohol = buying minor's alcohol, Other's Rx = Taking Other's Prescription Drugs, Cheating = Cheating on test

The first component in the Polish factor analysis is both interesting and problematic because it includes variety of types of items. For the this component, the following hypothetical deviant act variables have loadings of over .35: Motor Vehicle Theft Denial of the Victim, Motor Vehicle Theft Condemnation of Condemners, Larceny Denial of the Victim, Larceny Condemnation of Condemners, Burglary Denial of Injury, Burglary Denial of the Victim, Burglary Condemnation of Condemners, Assault Denial of Injury, Assault Condemnation of Condemners, Arson Denial of Injury, Arson Denial of the Victim, Arson Condemnation of Condemners, Robbery Denial of the Victim, Robbery Condemnation of Condemners, Rape Condemnation of Condemners, and Taking Other's Prescription Drugs Condemnation of Condemners. Of these sixteen factors, eight are associated with the neutralization technique condemnation of condemners, five are associated with denial of the victim, and three are associated with denial of injury. However, the factors with loadings of over .60 were condemnation of condemners for arson, burglary, and larceny. This suggests that the first component in the Polish factor analysis of neutralization usage can be interpreted as condemnation of condemners.

Other components in the Polish factor analysis are considerably more intuitive. The second component joins Assault Condemnation of Condemners with all five murder neutralization deviant act scenarios, and the murder scenarios all load at .70 or above to Assault Condemnation of Condemners' .40, suggesting that the second component can be identified as murder. The third component includes all five of the sexual text message neutralization deviant act scenarios, the fourth contains all of the rape scenarios, the fifth contains all of the buying minors alcohol scenarios, the sixth contains all of the test cheating scenarios, and the seventh contains all of the taking another's prescription drugs scenarios.

The eighth component is another that presents some difficulties in interpretation. The following factors have loadings of over .35: Motor Vehicle Theft Denial of Responsibility, Larceny Denial of Responsibility, Burglary Denial of Responsibility, Burglary Denial of Injury, Burglary Appeal to Higher Loyalties, Arson Denial of Responsibility, Arson Appeal to Higher Loyalties, and Robbery Denial of Responsibility. Of the eight factors on this component, five relate to denial of responsibility, and three of those five are the only factors associated with this component to have loadings of over .60, suggesting that this component can be interpreted as denial of responsibility.

The ninth component, simpler, unites all five robbery factors, while the tenth contains all of the assaults but condemnation of condemners. The eleventh merges various appeal to higher loyalties, while twelfth contains all of the motor vehicle theft scenarios (except condemnation of condemners) and the thirteenth is understandable as larceny, containing as interpretable components Larceny Denial of Injury and Larceny Denial of the Victim.

US factor analysis is broadly similar, in that all components it produces are understandable as either measures of deviant acts or measures of neutralization techniques. All of the US factor analysis' first component's interpretable factors are associated with denial of responsibility, while the second component, interestingly, has as interpretable factors a mixture of scenarios associated with rape and condemnation of condemners. The third component is understandable as a mixture of motor vehicle theft, burglary, and arson, the fourth component is associated with buying minors alcohol, the fifth is associated with taking others' prescription drugs, the sixth is associated with test cheating, the seventh is associated with sending sexual text messages, the eighth is associated with appeal to higher loyalties, the ninth is associated with murder, the tenth is associated with motor vehicle theft, the eleventh is associated with assault, and the twelfth is associated with robbery.

Negative Binomial Link to Deviant Behavior

Above, descriptive statistics and factor analysis has been used to explore differences and similarities between scenarios of crime and crime-related behavior, to

determine what sorts of effects various neutralization techniques may have on college students' hypothetical willingness to commit such acts, and to find out whether neutralization techniques vary together even when applied to different acts. How related are the crime and crime-related scenarios analyzed above to actual deviant behavior? To find out, negative binomial regression was conducted to determine if a composite score or index of four acts of minor deviance (texting sexual images, buying minors alcohol, taking another's prescription drugs, and cheating on texts) predicts indexes of hypothetical neutralization-related Uniform Crime Reports crimes and hypothetical neutralization-related minor deviance on the individual level. Negative binomial regression was chosen instead of standard ordinary least squares regression to mitigate issues associated with overdispersion in the variables. The Polish data is used exclusively in below analysis because data from the United States shows broadly similar results, and for reasons of space.

Table 3. Minor Deviance on Hypothetical Neutralized Minor Deviance – Polish data

Parameter Estimates							
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	3.727	.0307	3.666	3.787	14714.360	1	.000
AgDoYou	.025	.0021	.020	.029	132.416	1	.000
Scale	1a						
Negative binomial	.002b						
Dependent Variable: AgMinor Model: (Intercept), AgDoYou							

a. Fixed at the displayed value.

b. Hessian matrix singularity is caused by the scale or negative binomial parameter.

Table 3 shows the coefficient and significance level associated with the acts of minor deviance index's predictive value towards the index of hypothetical neutralization-related minor deviance in Poland. In other words, the coefficient and significance level associated with the predictive value of real minor deviance predicting the outcome variable, hypothetical neutralization-assisted minor deviance. The single index predictor variable is significant at the .000 alpha level.

Table 4 shows the coefficient and significance level associated with the acts of minor deviance index's predictive value towards the hypothetical neutralization-related index of Uniform Crime Reports crimes in Poland. The single index predictor variable is significant at the .000 alpha levels.

Table 4. Minor Deviance on Hypothetical Neutralized UCR Deviance – data from Poland

Parameter Estimates							
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	4.835	.0225	4.790	4.879	46125.012	1	.000
AgDoYou	.008	.0016	.005	.012	28.794	1	.000
Scale	1a						
Negative binomial	.001b						
Dependent Variable: AgUCR Model: (Intercept), AgDoYou							

a. Fixed at the displayed value.

b. Hessian matrix singularity is caused by the scale or negative binomial parameter.

Table 4 is an indicator of the validity of the neutralization hypotheses testing regime presented throughout this paper. Students who admit to actually committing crimes are also willing to admit they might commit additional crimes in the future (alpha level .000). This indicates the existence of a relationship between the neutralization hypotheticals and actual criminality, and suggests that individuals who rate themselves as crime-prone on the neutralization scales may actually be crime-prone, even if they do not yet have a record, and thus are giving an accurate assessment of what situations would make them most likely to commit a future crime.

Discussion

The present analysis has attempted to clarify potential distinctions between neutralization types, and validate such distinctions by use of a two-nation sample. The finding that the neutralization, denial of responsibility, is most associated with college students' endorsement of willingness to commit hypothetical crimes, at a relative frequency surpassing other neutralization techniques, is indicative of a general pattern of divergent utilities across neutralization techniques. The technique condemnation of condemners was found to be particularly ineffective at aiding college students in abandoning traditional noncriminal values. The techniques denial of injury, denial of the victim, and appeal to higher loyalty fall somewhere in the middle, though appeal to higher loyalty in the context of buying alcohol for minors appears to be a special case where appeal to higher loyalty gains a great deal of persuasiveness.

Understanding that certain techniques of neutralization are potentially more powerful than others, and not interchangeable, may aid criminologists and other researchers in unwrapping the 'black box' of criminology-determining what, explicitly, pushes individuals into committing and continuing to commit deviant acts. The present study suggests that contexts where individuals lack a sense of their own agency may be especially criminogenic (since denial of responsibility is a disproportionately popular neutralization technique), and gives support to juvenile delinquent programming aimed at building a sense of self-responsibility. If offenders and potential offenders are made aware of the dangers of feeling they have no choice but to commit certain acts, they may be more able to resist impulses.

Another issue this study addresses is more theoretical. Research on neutralization is divided on whether neutralizations are supposed to occur prior to criminal behavior, as a desensitizing mechanism to pave the way, or after criminal behavior, in order to prevent the offender's self-image from collapsing. The present analysis suggests that neutralization may occur in both locations. The results of one of the negative binomial analyses above suggests respondents with histories of minor deviant behavior also rated themselves susceptible to neutralizations associated with minor deviant behavior. This finding supports the argument that neutralizations may occur after offending behavior. However, the result of the other negative binomial analysis suggests that respondents who commit minor deviant behavior are also more likely to neutralize severe crimes. Since it is unlikely that the same individuals who cheat on tests and buy minors alcohol are *generally* arsonists, rapists, and murderers, being that acts of minor deviance would seem to be considerably more common than the worst of the felonies, evidence from the second negative binomial regression suggests that neutralization is an iterative process, where the commission of certain offenses (accidental or intentional) propel the offender to neutralize, which in turn may propel the offender to commit new offenses.

The present study, while using a two-nation sample, is limited in its generalizability by the nature of the sample-college students. Whether denial of responsibility is actually used disproportionately by groups such as repeat felony offenders is a question for further research to answer. This study makes a contribution by providing a new measure of techniques of neutralization and the results suggest that it is easier for college students to imagine themselves committing certain crimes and also for them to utilize certain neutralizations. Finally the findings demonstrate that Sykes and Matza's techniques of neutralization are not interchangeable.

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