

MicroCase exercise #4:
An exploration of differential association theory

INTRODUCTION

In this data analysis exercise, we will use Wave VII data from the National Youth Survey to explore differential association theory, a theory presented in Part V.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATASET

See MicroCase exercise #3 for a description of the NYS dataset. Before we start our analyses, we'll need to load up our dataset, 'NYSCRIME.'

EXPLORING DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION THEORY: GETTING A HANDLE ON THE DATA AND USING CROSSTABULATION TABLES

Part V presents a number of the early theories that explain crime. Although it was developed in the 1930's, differential association is still one of the most widely cited theories. In a nutshell, Edwin Sutherland argued that we become delinquents because we associate with other delinquents and learn how to commit crimes from them. While we also learn good behaviors from others, it was delinquency that most interested Sutherland. Sutherland also argued that the more important a relationship is to a person, the stronger the association with what is being learned. Therefore, If I hang out with people who drink at parties, I may decide to drink at parties because there is an excess of definitions in favor of doing so. On the other hand, if I hang out with the campus ministry, I may decide to have bible-reading meetings on Friday nights while other people are out drinking at parties. The NYS is an excellent dataset for testing some of the tenets of differential association.

Rather than run frequencies on the demographic factors that we have already examined (in the exercises for Part V), we can now turn our attention to the tenets of differential association. They are discussed in detail in Sutherland's article, so I'll just summarize the ones we're going to explore (unfortunately, some of the tenets are difficult to test with the NYS data so we'll confine ourselves to three that we can test easily).

When we are trying to test a theory or a part of a theory, we often face the difficulty of trying to choose variables from our dataset that match the theory's propositions. We had this problem when we looked at the correlates of crime because we had to use INCOME to measure social class. Researchers often find that the "fit" of the variables included in the data collected by others may be less than ideal. In some cases, this less than ideal fit may be beneficial, as it allows us to move beyond the most basic elements in a theory, into alternate measures of those elements. This form of replication can get exciting, as we'll soon see.

Now, let's turn our attention to finding some appropriate variables, like we did in the exercises for Part 5 when we looked at social disorganization theory. The numbers below correspond to Sutherland's original numbering of his propositions.

Tenet # 3:

The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups. Basically, this tenet means that if a person's close friends view crime as acceptable, s/he may also lean in that direction. If mere acquaintances suggest violating a law, however, the person is less likely to follow along. Sutherland was quite adamant that people learned from those with whom they interacted in their lives (rather than TV or other media), but it is important to realize that TV was less common in Sutherland's day. More recent scholars have amended this tenet to reflect the strong presence of the media in today's world.

One series of questions in the NYS asked respondents how much disapproval their parents, close friends, co-workers and domestic partners (spouses or live-in boyfriends/girlfriends) would feel if the respondent broke the law. Before we test the tenets, run frequencies on OPINPAR, OPINPEER, OPINWORK, and OPINPART in order to get a better handle on these variables. From the frequencies, we note that very few of the parents and co-workers approved of marijuana at all, while close friends and partners were more likely to approve of its use. Based on these frequencies, we would usually collapse categories (at least for parents' opinion) to ensure that all the categories had enough cases to make the analysis meaningful. Since we will be comparing the findings across the four tables, however, we will leave them in their original condition. If you wish, you can recode the variables on your own and re-run the tables.

If Sutherland's theory is right, co-workers' opinions should be less influential than those of more important/ intimate individuals in the respondents' lives (i.e., parents, partners, and close friends). To see if the NYS data support this idea, run a crosstabulation with marijuana use (USEDMJ) as the dependent (row) variable and OPINPAR, OPINPEER, OPINWORK, and OPINPART as the independent (column) variables. Make sure to click on column percents, then summary statistics to get the Cramer's V and probability. We'll just look at marijuana use, leaving theft and violence for you to explore for the "further exploration" questions.

What do you notice about the OPINPAR --> USED MJ table? We'll ignore the first two columns ('strongly approve' and 'approve') because they have too few cases to allow for valid statements; if one just case from either category were switched to another column, we would make entirely different statements about those columns. That leaves us with three valid columns to examine. The respondents who said their parents strongly disapproved of marijuana use were less likely to smoke marijuana themselves (76.7% said they did not use it during the previous year). Similarly, respondents who reported that their parents disapproved of marijuana were more likely than their counterparts with less approving parents to report that they smoked marijuana (50.7% did not use it). Those who reported more ambivalent parents, however, were likely to use marijuana (only 18.8% did not smoke it). To learn the strength of the relationship between parental opinion of marijuana use and respondents' actual use, look at the Cramer's V. It is a strong relationship and is statistically significant. We can say, therefore, that the two variables are related.

Now turn your attention to the OPINPEER --> USED MJ table. We notice that 92.3% of respondents whose friends disapprove of marijuana use state that they themselves do not use the drug and that the percentage of smokers increases as peer disapproval diminishes. In fact, it appears that marijuana smoking might be more

strongly related to peer opinion than to parental opinion. To see if that's true, check the statistics. Our suspicions are confirmed; the Cramer's V of .53 indicates a strong relationship and it is statistically significant.

The OPINWORK --> USED MJ table shows that marijuana use is less related to co-worker opinion. We can tell by looking at the cell percentages and the Cramer's V. Of the three variables we've looked at so far, co-worker opinion seems to be the least influential.

The final table, OPINPART --> USED MJ further supports Sutherland's theory. Respondents whose domestic partners disapproved of marijuana use were the least likely of all to smoke it. Taken together, this analysis supports tenet number three of differential association theory. Wasn't that fun? Now, let's examine another tenet.

Tenet #5:

The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable. Basically, this tenet argues that people learn from others whether laws are something to be followed (e.g., that laws are good or help society and should always be obeyed) or something to be broken from time to time (e.g., that laws are ways to oppress the poor).

The NYS asked if the respondents' friends had ever suggested that they break the law. It seems logical that such suggestions, coming from friends, could play some role in the respondents' views of whether laws are inviolable. Sutherland felt that when those close to us suggest actions contrary to the law, we may begin to agree with their recommendations. To see if this is true, first run a frequency on SUGGBLAW, then run a crosstabulation table with marijuana use (USED MJ) as the dependent (row) variable and SUGGBLAW as the independent (column) variable. The frequency table shows that more than a fifth of the respondents reported that one or more friends suggested that they break the law.

What does the crosstabulation table show? How often is marijuana smoked by the majority of respondents who said none of their friends had suggested that they break the law? What is the general trend for marijuana smoking as more and more of the respondents' friends suggested breaking the law? What is the strength of the relationship shown in the table? Is it statistically significant? How can we summarize this table? Does this finding support differential association theory?

6. *Criminal behavior results from an excess of definitions in favor of violating a law.* In other words, if you repeatedly see the benefits of breaking a law, it will be easier for you to commit the crime yourself. Assume that you live around one or more drug dealers, through whom you see the benefits of selling drugs such as flashy cars, stylish dress, and money. Assume those around you tell you it's not bad to sell drugs, possibly by pointing out that you would only be filling a necessary niche in society. Assume your friends buy and use drugs and tell you that this is acceptable behavior. These envisioned benefits form the basis of an excess of definitions. Once a crime is no longer repulsive, potential criminals may begin to break the law. The NYS data don't have all these variables, but the survey did ask how many of the respondents' friends smoked marijuana (it also asked how many had stolen items and engaged in violence).

So, if most of your friends break a law, you may break it, too, right? Let's find out. To explore this idea, run a frequency of PEERS_MJ, then run a crosstabulation

table with marijuana use (USEDMJ) as the dependent (row) variable and PEERS_MJ as the independent (column) variable. The frequency table shows that a sizable number of friends smoked marijuana themselves.

What does the crosstabulation table show? How often is marijuana smoked by those who said none of their friends smoked it? What is the general trend for marijuana smoking as more and more of the respondents' friends smoked it? What is the strength of the relationship shown in the table? Is it statistically significant? How can we summarize this table? Does this table support differential association theory?

FURTHER EXPLORATION OF DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION THEORY

We have now explored three tenets of Sutherland's differential association theory as they apply to smoking marijuana. If the theory is a good one, it should apply to crimes in addition to marijuana smoking. In the "further exploration" questions, you'll apply the theory to thefts of goods valued at more than \$50.00 and violent offenses.

DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION THEORY ON YOUR OWN

Now that we have explored three tenets of Sutherland's differential association theory, you could devise other ways of measuring and testing the tenets. For example, importance of family could be measured through amount of time spent visiting the respondents' families (VISITFAM). This is a difficult assignment, but try to think of other ways to measure the three tenets we tested or one of the other six tenets. If any of your ideas appears in the NYSCRIME dataset, run some analyses to test it. Otherwise, run some tables for importance of family as measured through habitual visiting.

While you are further examining differential association theory, reflect on how it helps us explain why some people break the law. Think also about crimes and/or situations that it cannot adequately address and other weaknesses of the theory.

[PLEASE DO NOT TURN IN THESE PRECEDING SHEETS WITH YOUR ASSIGNMENT- THEY ARE FOR YOU TO KEEP]

Homework for MicroCase #4: General questions
(differential association theory)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Answer the following questions by filling in the blanks or circling the appropriate responses. A couple of answers have been filled in for you to make sure you're on the right track.

Exploring differential association theory:

Getting a handle on the data and using crosstabulation tables:

Tenet #3:

1. Complete the following table using percentages from the frequency tables for OPINPAR, OPINPEER, OPINWORK and OPINPART:

Group	% of respondents within each group who:				
	strongly approve	approve	neither disapprove nor approve	disapprove	strongly disapprove
parents					57.1
close friends					
co-workers					
partners	0	6.3			

2. Complete the following table using percentages of respondents who smoked marijuana during the past year and statistics from the crosstabulation tables for OPINPAR --> USED MJ, OPINPEER --> USED MJ, OPINWORK --> USED MJ and OPINPART --> USED MJ:

Variable	% of respondents smoked marijuana during the past year by category				
	category strongly approve	category approve	category neither disapprove nor approve	category disapprove	category strongly disapprove
parents' opinion: Cramers' V= .367 sig=.000	ignore: not enough cases	ignore: not enough cases	81.2	49.3	23.3
close friends' opinion: Cramers' V= _____ sig=_____					
co-worker opinion: Cramers' V= _____ sig=_____	ignore: not enough cases				
partner opinion: Cramers' V= _____ sig=_____	0 cases				

2b. Briefly explain this finding using differential association theory.

3. As parental opinion becomes more negative towards marijuana use, respondents are

more / less likely to smoke marijuana.

4. As close friends' opinions become more negative towards marijuana use, respondents are *more / less* likely to smoke marijuana.
5. As co-worker opinion becomes more negative towards marijuana use, respondents are *more / less* likely to smoke marijuana.
6. As partner opinion becomes more negative towards marijuana use, respondents are *more / less* likely to smoke marijuana.
7. From the Cramer's V statistics above, it appears that the strongest relationship is found between marijuana smoking and the opinions regarding marijuana smoking that are held by *parents / close friends / co-workers / partners*. Conversely, the weakest relationship is found between marijuana smoking and the opinions regarding marijuana smoking that are held by *parents / close friends / co-workers / partners*.
- 7b. Summarize the findings for tenet #3, using differential association theory.

Tenet #5:

1. In Wave VII of the NYS dataset, _____% of the sample had no friends suggest that they break the law, _____% had very few of their friends advocate law-breaking, _____% had some of their friends suggest they break the law, _____% had most of their friends made such a suggestion, and _____% had all of their friends advise that they break a law.

2. Complete the following table using the percentage of respondents who smoked marijuana during the past year and statistics from the crosstabulation table for SUGGBLAW --> USED MJ:

	% of respondents who smoked marijuana during the past year by # of friends who suggested that respondent break the law				
	none of them	very few of them	some of them	most of them	all of them
Cramers' V= _____ sig=_____					

3. As the number of their friends who suggest that respondents break a law increases, respondents are *more / less* likely to smoke marijuana. This relationship is *weak / moderate / strong*. This relationship *is / is not* statistically significant.
- 3b. Summarize the findings for tenet #5, using differential association theory.

Tenet #6:

1. In Wave VII of the NYS dataset, _____% of the sample had no friends who smoked marijuana, _____% had very few friends who did, _____% had some friends who used marijuana, _____% said most of their friends smoked it, _____% said all of their friends were marijuana smokers.
2. Complete the following table using the percentage of the respondents's friends who smoked marijuana and statistics from the crosstabulation table for PEERS_MJ --> USED MJ:

	% of respondents who smoked marijuana during the past year by # of friends who smoke marijuana				
	none of them	very few of them	some of them	most of them	all of them
Cramers' V= _____ sig=_____					

3. As the percentage of their friends who smoke marijuana increases, respondents are *more / less* likely to smoke marijuana themselves. This relationship is *weak / moderate / strong*. This relationship *is / is not* statistically significant.
- 3b. Summarize the findings for tenet #6, using differential association theory.

4. What does all of this mean? Please answer in essay form, summarizing what you have learned about differential association theory from this part of the MicroCase.

Homework for MicroCase #4: "Further exploration" questions
(differential association theory)

Name: _____

Date: _____

TASK: See if the measures we have developed for differential association theory (OPINPAR, OPINPEER, OPINWORK, and OPINPART) are statistically related to either THEFT50 or VIOLENCE. Make sure you substitute the opinions relevant to each crime (i.e., use OPINPAR2, OPINPEE2, OPINWOR2 and OPINPA2 for THEFT50 and OPINPAR3, OPINPEE3, OPINWOR3 and OPINPA3 for VIOLENCE). While you only need to replicate the process for one crime (THEFT50 or VIOLENCE), you may do both.

Answer the following questions by filling in the blanks or circling the appropriate responses.

1. Which crime did you choose? *THEFT50 / VIOLENCE*
- 1b. What do you predict, based on differential association theory?

Tenet #3:

2. Complete the following table using percentages from the frequency tables for opinions, being careful to choose the ones that match your crime:

Group	% of respondents within each group who:				
	strongly approve	approve	neither disapprove nor approve	disapprove	strongly disapprove
parents					
close friends					
co-workers					
partners					

3. Complete the following table using percentages of respondents violated the law

addressed by your dependent variable and statistics from the crosstabulation tables for
 OPINPAR2/3 --> THEFT50/VIOLENCE, OPINPEE2/3 -->
 THEFT50/VIOLENCE, OPINWOR2/3 --> THEFT50/VIOLENCE, and
 OPINPA2/3 --> THEFT50/VIOLENCE:

Variable	% of respondents who violated the law addressed by your dependent variable by category				
	category strongly approve	category approve	category neither disapprove nor approve	category disapprove	category strongly disapprove
parents' opinion: Cramers' V=_____ sig=_____					
close friends' opinion: Cramers' V=_____ sig=_____					
co-worker opinion: Cramers' V=_____ sig=_____					
partner's opinion: Cramers' V=_____ sig=_____					

3b. Briefly explain the above table, using differential association theory.

4. As parental opinion becomes more negative towards *THEFT50 / VIOLENCE*, respondents are *more / less* likely to break that law.
5. As close friends' opinions become more negative towards *THEFT50 / VIOLENCE*, respondents are *more / less* likely to break that law.
6. As co-worker opinion becomes more negative towards *THEFT50 / VIOLENCE*, respondents are *more / less* likely to break that law.
7. As partner opinion becomes more negative towards *THEFT50 / VIOLENCE*, respondents are *more / less* likely to break that law.
8. From the Cramer's V statistics above, it appears that the strongest relationship is found between *THEFT50 / VIOLENCE* and the opinions regarding that crime that are held by *parents / close friends / co-workers / partners*. Conversely, the weakest relationship is found between the crime and the opinions regarding that crime that are held by *parents / close friends / co-workers / partners*.
POINTS TO PONDER: Can you try to explain the differences from what we found for USED MJ and what you found for your dependent variable with respect to the "weakest" relationship? (In other words, why are the opinions of co-workers more strongly associated with marijuana use than what you found for thefts or violence?)
- 8b. Summarize the findings for tenet #3, using differential association theory.

Tenet #5:

9. Complete the following table using the percentage of respondents who smoked marijuana during the past year and statistics from the crosstabulation table for SUGGBLAW --> THEFT50 or SUGGBLAW --> VIOLENCE:

	% of respondents who committed <i>theft / violence</i> by # of friends who suggested that the respondent break the law				
	none of them	very few of them	some of them	most of them	all of them
Cramers' V= _____ sig=_____					

10. As the number of their friends who suggest that respondents break a law increases, respondents are *more / less* likely to commit *theft / violence*. This relationship is *weak / moderate / strong*. This relationship *is / is not* statistically significant.
- 10b. Summarize the findings for tenet #5, using differential association theory.

Tenet #6:

11. Complete the following table using the percentage of the respondents's friends who smoked marijuana and statistics from the crosstabulation table for PEERS50 --> THEFT50 or PEERSVIO --> VIOLENCE:

	% of respondents who committed <i>theft / violence</i> by # of friends who have committed the same crime				
	none of them	very few of them	some of them	most of them	all of them
Cramers' V= _____ sig=_____					

12. As the percentage of their friends who smoke break a law increases, respondents are *more / less* likely to break that same law. This relationship is *weak / moderate / strong*. This relationship *is / is not* statistically significant.

- 12b. Summarize the findings for tenet #3, using differential association theory.

13. Overall, it appears that our findings using the Wave VII of the NYS *support / do not support* differential association.

14. What does all of this mean? Please answer in essay form, summarizing what you have learned about differential association theory from this part of the MicroCase.

Affirmation of Independent Work

Submission of this assignment constitutes a statement on your part that apart from technical help, you completed this assignment on your own. Plagiarism will be reported to University authorities and can result in expulsion from the University.

Your Name: _____ Signature: _____

Homework for MicroCase #4: "On your own" questions
(differential association theory)

Name: _____

Date: _____

TASK: Try to think of other ways to measure the three tenets we tested and the other six as well. If any of your ideas appears in the dataset, run some analyses to test it. Otherwise, run some tables VISITFAM.

Directions: Answer the following questions. NOTE: Please print out and include your tables with these questions so your work can be graded.

Differential association theory on your own:

1. Which variable did you choose as your independent variable and which tenet does it attempt to measure/test?
2. How did your independent variable affect marijuana use? Make sure to provide a description that includes the percentages, Cramer's V value, the strength of the relationship, and the significance value.
3. How did your independent variable affect thefts of goods worth more than \$50.00? Make sure to provide a description that includes the percentages, Cramer's V value, the strength of the relationship, and the significance value.
4. How did your independent variable affect violent offenses? Make sure to provide a description that includes the percentages, Cramer's V value, the strength of the relationship, and the significance value.
5. Can you say your tenet testing supports differential association? Why/why not? If you included more than independent variable, you may summarize the findings on the back of this sheet for future reference.