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## SOME DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES BETWEEN GROUPS OF REPEATING CRIMINALS AND OF FIRST OFFENDERS

RUTH SHERMAN TOLMAN<sup>1</sup>

Among the many investigations in the field of criminal behavior there is to be found but little material on the expressed attitudes of the criminal himself. For this we are dependent chiefly upon a few biographies and scattered references in individual case studies. From recent psychoanalytic researches, insight is gained into the underlying mechanisms of criminal behavior in terms of emotional conflicts originating for the most part in disturbances of the so-called libidinal relationships within the family.<sup>2</sup> But this material is accessible only through the highly technical methods of psychoanalysis. From most of the sociological studies, on the other hand, unsuccessful family and community relationships and poor work habits, viewed externally, emerge as associated with criminal conduct and with recidivism.<sup>3</sup>

The present study is an attempt to explore by the use of psychological methods certain explicit conscious attitudes of the individual criminal, more peripheral than the findings of psychoanalysis, less peripheral than those of the sociologists, which might reasonably be expected to accompany the psychoanalytic and sociological findings. With the growing belief that the criminal's own statements may be accepted, at least tentatively, as representing his attitudes, it seemed reasonable to enquire: Is there to be found in the individual with established criminal habits greater dissatisfaction with the community in which he lives, with his work, with the prevailing economic and political regime? Is there present a greater feeling of isolation from his fellows, a greater amount of resentment at society and of antagonism toward authority? Do his descriptions of parental relationships suggest greater reserve and the presence of antagonism more often than do those of a suitably chosen control

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander, F. and Healy, W. *Roots of Crime*. New York, Knopf, 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Glueck, Sheldon and Eleanor. *Five Hundred Criminal Careers*. New York, Knopf, 1930. Glueck, Sheldon and Eleanor. *Later Criminal Careers*. New York, The Commonwealth Fund, 1937.

group? Are his expressions of affect toward wife or children markedly different? In short, do we find in the more confirmed criminal a greater measure of disturbance in those relationships for which the word "sociotropic" might be suggested?

#### CASES STUDIED

Two groups of fifty each were selected from male applicants for probation in Los Angeles County over the period from June, 1936, to May, 1937. One group whose records showed at least three prior offenses was compared with a group of first offenders whose records, habits, and present attitudes were such as to entitle them to probation in the eyes of the court and of the probation officer. The latter were regarded as the closest possible approximation to a control group. Their status as single offenders, while not at this point established, was strongly suggested by the granting of probation, since the per cent of probation violators is known to be small. All were of the white race, and in age between twenty and forty. All were guilty by plea or verdict of crimes against property. All were studied while in custody awaiting sentence, after application for probation had been filed. Psychopathic cases were excluded from both groups.

#### METHODS USED

##### *a. Interview and Ratings Based on Interview Material*

An oral questionnaire was used, the early questions dealing with the prisoner's term of residence in this and other communities, with any residence preferences he might feel, with his work experiences, with his work plans and preferences, and with subjects touching his relationship to his personal, social, and political environment. The questions were so arranged that at the beginning of the interview there was nothing emotionally charged which would arouse resistance. Later in the interview questions were introduced involving possible criticisms of his own treatment and feelings of grievance, exploring his friendliness or hostility toward his parents, his reserve or freedom with them, the strictness or leniency of his training, and the like. The responses were recorded briefly during the interview, and such details as could not be written in full were filled in immediately after while the prisoner was at work on the intelligence test.

In the attempt to translate this material into some roughly

quantitative form, ratings on a five-point scale based on this interview were made on the following fifteen items:

1. Dissatisfaction with the community.
2. Dissatisfaction with work.
3. Social behavior: avoidance of group activities.
4. Social behavior: avoidance of individual contacts.
5. Political insurgency.
6. Social preferences: desire for solitude.
7. "Chip on the shoulder."
8. Antagonism toward authority.
9. Reserve with father.
10. Antagonism toward father.
11. Reserve with mother.
12. Antagonism toward mother.
13. Dissatisfaction with marital experiences.
14. Dissatisfaction with children.
15. Lack of integration with ideal.

In each case the high rating indicates the anti-social end of the scale, five being the maximum dissatisfaction with the community, with work, etc.

The reliability, or consistency, of these ratings was high, the coefficients ranging from .81 to .89 when judgments of two other raters on the interviews were correlated with each other and with the writer's early and later ones. Comparing judgments of two raters on the individual items based on fifty interviews, the reliability coefficients were also high, ranging from .66 to .88.

#### b. *Intelligence Test*

The Otis Self-Administering Intermediate Examination, Form A, was administered. Earlier experience had proved that the ease of administration of this test made it useful as an approximate measure. The reliability of the examination, using two forms, is reported as .948.

#### c. *Self-Ordinary-Ideal Test*

An attempt was made to discover by an indirect method the degree of the prisoner's feeling of difference both from his own ideals and from his fellows. This attempt was made by means of a modification of the Self-Ordinary-Ideal test.<sup>4</sup> In the form used it contained twenty-eight items, fourteen of which were devised to

<sup>4</sup> Sweet, L. *The Measurement of Personal Attitudes in Younger Boys.* N. Y., Association Press, 1929.

sample attitudes toward ways of life which involved assuming or avoiding responsibility, winning or losing popular attention or approval, participating in or rejecting social enterprises, and the like. The second fourteen had to do with recreation preferences involving solitary or social activities. The subject was asked to state in regard to each item whether he would like, dislike, or feel indifferent to it; whether he would wish his son to like, dislike, or feel indifferent to it (this was in the attempt to sample his ideal); whether he believed that most men like, dislike, or feel indifferent to it. These responses were scored from  $-1$  to  $+1$ , and difference scores were computed. The test had reliabilities ranging from .73 to .86 when odd items were correlated against even.

d. Superficial ratings on seventeen traits were made at the time of interview.

e. Biographical and sociological data were compared for the two groups.

## RESULTS

### a. Ratings Based on Interview

In Table I are given the mean ratings for both groups on the fifteen items based on the interview:

TABLE I  
RATINGS BASED ON INTERVIEW

Item	—Repeaters—			First Offenders			Diff. Means	Diff. S. D.	Chance Real Diff. <sup>s</sup>
	No. Cases	Mean	Stand. Deviation	No. Cases	Mean	Stand. Deviation			
1 Dissatisfaction with community	50	2.08	1.31	50	1.41	1.19	.67	2.68	996
2 Dissatisfaction with work.....	50	1.97	1.10	50	1.59	1.16	.38	1.65	951
3 Social behavior: Avoiding groups .....	50	3.24	0.83	50	2.85	1.09	.39	2.00	978
4 Social behavior: Avoiding individuals .....	50	1.98	1.42	50	1.54	1.15	.44	1.69	955
5 Political insurgency .....	50	2.77	1.00	50	2.16	0.89	.61	3.25	999
6 Desire for solitude.....	50	1.55	1.17	50	1.40	1.04	.15	0.68	752
7 "Chip on the shoulder".....	50	2.71	1.18	50	1.38	0.70	1.33	6.75	999
8 Antagonism toward authority..	50	2.39	1.19	50	1.23	0.64	1.16	6.10	999
9 Reserve with father.....	47	3.87	1.37	42	2.68	1.26	1.19	4.26	999
10 Antagonism toward father....	48	2.91	1.44	44	1.83	1.40	1.08	3.64	999
11 Reserve with mother.....	49	3.50	1.42	48	2.46	1.40	1.04	3.64	999
12 Antagonism toward mother....	49	2.01	1.07	49	1.56	1.07	.45	2.08	981
13 Dissatisfaction with marriage..	20	2.60	1.45	20	1.78	1.60	.82	1.70	956
14 Antagonism toward children...	10	1.70	0.81	12	1.17	1.00	.53	1.38	917
15 Lack of integration with ideal	50	2.84	1.15	50	1.52	1.07	1.32	5.99	999

<sup>s</sup> Chances in 1000 that the real difference in the direction indicated is greater than zero.

It can be observed that all of the differences are in the expected direction; that is, on each item the group of repeating criminals expresses more hostility or dissatisfaction than the first offender. Indeed, this trend is so consistent that it can hardly be ascribed to accident and must be taken to indicate a real difference between the two groups. It can also be observed that there is wide dispersion in both groups, so that, at least for the characteristics here investigated, we can make no sharp division of the two groups into types nor have we any justification whatever for trusting the rating of a given individual on these items as a valid criterion for deciding to which group he belongs.

Although some of these differences found are very marked, it cannot be urged that in this study a causal relationship has been in any sense established in the association of these characteristics with the more habitual criminal behavior. For in the adult criminal it is impossible to differentiate between those attitudes acquired in the course of, and even because of, his criminal career, and those with which he may have embarked upon the career. The mechanism of projection of responsibility and guilt must always be borne in mind in the interpretation of such attitudes as these investigated. But even if one should wish to take a cautious stand upon the ground that *all* of these attitudes are projections, it is yet of interest to enquire *in what directions* such projections tend to occur.

Statistically significant differences<sup>6</sup> emerge on the following items:

5. Political insurgency.
7. "Chip on the shoulder."
8. Antagonism toward authority.
9. Reserve with father.
10. Antagonism toward father.
11. Reserve with mother.
15. Lack of integration with the ideal.

Although the repeaters show significantly higher ratings on Item 5, Political insurgency, it is not to be inferred from this that

<sup>6</sup> By "statistically significant" we shall mean throughout this discussion those differences in which  $\frac{\text{S. D. Diff.}}{\text{Diff.}} = 3$ .

Expressed in terms of probability, it may be stated in regard to differences of such magnitude that there is only one chance in 1000 that such large differences in the samples would be found if there were no difference in the parent populations.

either group expressed much tendency toward radicalism, as the means on the "approving" or non-radical side of the midpoint indicate. Indeed, lively political or economic interest was seldom encountered in either group, but the fact that 68% of the first offenders were alleged voters while only 34% of the repeaters so claimed suggests that at any rate this interest was more active in the former group.

On Item 7, "Chip on the shoulder," the repeaters show strikingly higher ratings. Feelings of grievance, of having had an "unfair deal" at home, at school, at the hands of the courts,—this theme recurs throughout their stories. To be sure, the actual character of their past treatment could not at this point be ascertained, nor could it be claimed that these mild ideas of persecution antedated their delinquency. The same considerations apply to Item 8, Antagonism toward authority, which also shows a significant difference between the two groups. It was believed possible on psychoanalytic grounds that both of these items might derive from the attitude toward the father, sampled in Item 10, and correlations were computed for the two groups together. These correlations were .69 and .65, from which the inference seems reasonable that these two anti-social attitudes, feelings of grievance, or a "grudge-like attitude," as Healy terms it,<sup>7</sup> and antagonism toward authority in general, are associated to a high degree with hostility toward the father.

On three of the items sampling attitudes toward the parents (Items 9, 10, 11) significant differences were found between the two groups. These attitudes to some degree may well be the residue of ones present in childhood, the attempt being made in the interview to explore their early relations with the parents. Questions concerning parental strictness, nagging, habits of punishment, amount of interest and supervision, spoiling, affection, their own fears and approval and confidences,—all of these applied rather to the past than to the present, and it is reasonable to accept their account as describing their present conception of childhood situations. However, it must again be noted that criminal careers have supervened upon these childhoods in one of the groups, and the tendency to project blame and responsibility may easily cause the parents to be selected for this onus. The greater degree of hostility toward the father in the repeating group is evidence for the point

<sup>7</sup> Healy, W. *The Individual Delinquent*. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1927, p. 355.

(emphasized by Levy<sup>8</sup>) that we find in this group *not* individuals whose criminal act is a neurotic symptom, for then the hostility toward the father would be repressed; but we find rather those whose criminal behavior is an expression of aggressive personality drives and where the delinquent career may represent an active rebellion against the father generalized into other social relationships.

The findings in regard to attitudes toward the parents in these groups are consistent with those reported by Stevens<sup>9</sup> and on a more superficial level with those of Healy and Bronner in their most recent investigation.<sup>10</sup>

#### b. *Intelligence*

Results of the intelligence examination showed no significant differences between the means of the two groups, the mean I. Q. of the repeating group being 96.3, that of the first offenders 99.6.

#### c. *Self-Ordinary-Ideal Test*

In the Self-Ordinary-Ideal test, all the differences were in the expected direction; that is, the repeated offender, when these indirect and unformulated feelings of difference are investigated, tends to feel himself less close to his ideal and farther removed from the average man. He also puts a greater difference between the average man and his conception of the ideal. But none of these differences was large enough to be statistically significant.

#### d. *Superficial Ratings*

On the superficial ratings again all differences were in the expected direction; but on only one item, "cheerfulness," was this difference large. The repeaters were more sombre than the first offenders.

#### e. *Biographical and Sociological Data*

Of the biographical and sociological items considered, three showed a difference between the two groups of a magnitude to be

<sup>8</sup> Levy, D. M. On the Problem of Delinquency. *Amer. Jour. Orthopsychiatry*, 1932, 2, pp. 197-211.

<sup>9</sup> Stevens, G. C. Autobiographical material concerning the childhood environments and the effects on the after-adjustment of 100 recidivists and 100 college freshmen. *Amer. Jour. Orthopsychiatry*, 1932, 2, pp. 279-303.

<sup>10</sup> Healy and Bronner. *New Light on Delinquency*. Yale University Press, 1936.



regarded as significant. A higher per cent of repeaters reported the presence of parental friction; a higher per cent of first offenders mentioned having other property than their wages, and a higher per cent declared themselves voters. The difference in per cent reporting extremes of strictness or leniency in their upbringing approached a value regarded as statistically reliable. It was in the group of repeating criminals that this unfavorable home training was more frequently described.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study must be interpreted cautiously. For we are here studying adults, and in one group adults in whom criminal careers have inevitably affected their outlook. Nevertheless, it is of interest to discover that at a given stage in these careers there could be detected by psychological methods differences corresponding so closely to those observed by the application of psychiatric techniques continued over a long period.

A detailed report of this study was published in the Genetic Psychology Monograph series in August, 1938.