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# PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS

M. A. Durea<sup>1</sup> and M. H. Fertman<sup>1</sup>

## I. Problem

One of the present writers<sup>2</sup> has recently reported results bearing on the problem of characteristics of personality which differentiate delinquent from non-delinquent boys. The present investigation involves a similar objective, the exception is that an attempt is being made here to see the differentiating traits of each sex in a comparative light.

A three-fold purpose is implied in the problem: (a) to ascertain traits that are similar for the sexes; (b) to ascertain traits that are particularized for male juvenile offenders; and (c) to ascertain those that are particularized for female juvenile offenders.

## II. Method

In previous investigations<sup>3</sup> the Pressey Interest-Attitude Tests were employed. The same instrument has been used in the present connection. Four sub-tests comprise the Interest-Attitude Tests. Each sub-test contains 90 items. With the sub-tests four aspects of personality may be appraised: (a) things considered wrong; (b) anxieties, fears, worries; (c) likes and interests;

and (d) kinds of people liked or admired. The device has been described in detail elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

## III. Subjects

Comparable delinquent groups were drawn from two institutions: males from the Boys' Industrial School located at Lancaster, Ohio; females from the Girls' Industrial School, located at Delaware, Ohio. In the male group there were 316 subjects, in the female 180. Subjects in each group were of the white race. Aside from the racial factor, no other form of selection was apparent. Each group seemed to be constituted of juvenile offenders that were representative sampling of delinquents in general. Life ages of the boys ranged from 14 years, no months to 17 years, 11 months. For girls the life age range was from 15 years, no months to 17 years, 11 months.

## IV. Statistical Technique Employed in Selecting Differential Characteristics

Norms have been established for the 90 items constituting each of the four sub-tests of the Interest-Attitude Tests.<sup>5</sup> Norms are available for each sex from

<sup>1</sup> College of Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>2</sup> Durea, M. A.: Personality Characteristics of Juvenile Delinquents. I. A Method for the Selection of Differentiating Traits. *Child Development*, 1937, 8, 116-128.

—: Personality Characteristics of Juvenile Delinquents. II. Reliability of Differentiating Traits. *Child Development*, 1937, 8, 257-262.

<sup>3</sup> Durea, M. A.: Personality Characteristics of Juvenile Offenders in Relation to Degree of Delinquency. Jr. *Genetic Psych.*, 1938, 52, 269-283. See also references in Note 2.

<sup>4</sup> Pressey, S. L., and L. C.: Development of the Interest-Attitude Tests. *Jour. Appl. Psych.*, 1933, 17, 1-16.

<sup>5</sup> The Psychological Corporation, New York, N. Y.

the sixth grade to fourth year college. Item norms provide a basis for controls with which experimental groups may be compared.

The differential unit for each item is the number of responses per 100 cases. Subjects are requested to respond discriminatingly to the items embodied under each of the four categories: things considered wrong; anxieties, fears, and worries; likes and interests; and kinds of people liked or admired. For instance, in Test I (wrongs) the first five items are *accidents, fighting, ignorance, talking back, crying*.

Subjects are instructed to indicate by a single cross (X) everything which is regarded as *wrong*, and with a double cross (XX) everything considered *very wrong*. Responses in the other three sub-tests are indicated in a similar fashion. In computing the times per 100 cases of any given item, single-crossed items are counted once, double-crossed twice. Thus, if in a group of 50 subjects an item is single-crossed by 15 and double-crossed by 10 subjects the total responsiveness to the item is 35 and the times per 100 cases is 70. Similarly, if a given item is single-crossed by 30 and double-crossed by 15

of the 50 subjects the total number of responses is 60 and the number per 100 cases is 120. This basic differential unit has been used throughout the present experiment and given the designation *times-in-100*.

Taking into consideration each sex, controls were established in the following manner: first, it was assumed that median life ages for the grades (in terms of which item-norms were computed) were equivalent to conventional age-grade standards; second, since the male delinquents ranged in life age from 14 years, no months to 17 years, 11 months, item-norms for grades 8, 9, 10, and 11, i.e., life ages 14, 15, 16, and 17, respectively, were employed; third, since female delinquents ranged in age from 15 years, no months to 17 years, 11 months, item norms for grades 9, 10, and 11, i.e., life ages 15, 16, and 17, respectively, were used.

The mean times-in-100 of each item for the grades in question was computed, providing thus a single standard with which responses of delinquent boys could be compared and another with which to compare responses of delinquent girls. Table I will clarify the operations just described.

TABLE I  
TIMES-IN-100 RESPONSES WERE MADE BY MALES AND FEMALES (CONTROL GROUPS)  
TO SAMPLE ITEMS FROM TEST I OF INTEREST-ATTITUDE TESTS

Item	Grades								Mean	
	VIII		IX		X		XI			
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Accidents .....	51	..	50	47	52	42	45	38	50	42
Fighting .....	112	..	102	118	100	117	79	115	98	117
Ignorance .....	67	..	67	49	74	51	77	63	71	54

Note: Only three grades were used in computing means for females because life ages of delinquent girls ranged from assumed median life ages 15 to 17 years, inclusive.

The series of 90 means (of times-in-100) for items from each of the four sub-tests—based on norms for each sex

—formed the controls with which responses of male-female juvenile offenders were compared.

A further step was to ascertain the frequency of response elicited to each item from male and female experimental groups. Resulting frequencies were reduced to time-in-100. Next,

item-by-item comparisons in terms of the differential unit, times-in-100, were made, based on sex groups and their appropriate controls. Table II makes the foregoing procedure clear.

TABLE II  
COMPARISON OF MALE-FEMALE DELINQUENTS WITH CONTROLS, ON SAMPLE ITEMS FROM TEST I OF INTEREST-ATTITUDE TESTS, IN TERMS OF TIMES-IN-100

Item	Mean Times-in-100 (Control)		Times-in-100 (M. Delinq.) Diff.		Times-in-100 (F. Delinq.) Diff.	
	Accidents .....	50	42	64	+14	93
Fighting .....	98	117	110	+12	147	+30
Ignorance .....	71	54	74	+ 3	77	+23

If subjects of either delinquent group responded more times-in-100 than its respective control the difference value was designated by a plus sign. Opposite instances were denoted by a minus sign. Computations similar to those shown in Table II were performed on each of the four sub-tests, taking into consideration each experimental group and its respective control.

The last aspect of statistical treatment, adopted for the selection of dif-

ferentiating items, resembles a technique employed by Spencer.<sup>6</sup> Each series of 90 means of times-in-100 (controls) was cast into a frequency distribution. Four such distributions were cast for each sex, i.e., for each of the four sub-tests. The standard deviation of each distribution of 90 mean values was computed. Table III shows the frequency distribution for each sex resulting from Test I.

TABLE III  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION BY SEX OF MEAN TIMES-IN-100 VALUES FOR ITEMS OF TEST I  
Mean Times-in-100

Sex	0-	10-	20-	30-	40-	50-	60-	70-	80-	90-	100-	110-	120-	130-	Total	S.D.
M	9	19	29	39	49	59	69	79	89	99	109	119	129	139	90	32.69
F	6	14	11	12	10	8	2	8	4	5	2	5	3	0	90	34.01

The standard deviation of each distribution, similar for each sub-test to the procedure illustrated in Table III, was used as a method for extracting from each of four arrays of characteristics of personality the traits which

differentiate delinquents of each sex from non-delinquents. The significance of an item was regarded as a function of the difference of times-in-100 (delinquent vs. control) divided by an appropriate sigma. To illustrate the point in question Table IV has been constructed.

<sup>6</sup> Spencer, D.: *Fulcrum of Conflict*. Yonkers-on-Hudson: World Book Co., 1939, pp. 134-161.

TABLE IV  
TECHNIQUE EMPLOYED IN SELECTION OF SIGNIFICANT ITEMS:  
ILLUSTRATED BY SAMPLE ITEMS FROM TEST I

Item	Mean		Time-in-100		Difference		Diff. ÷ S.D.	
	Time-in-100 (Control)		Time-in-100 (Delinquent)					
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Accidents ....	50	42	64	93	+14	+51	+43	+1.50
Fighting .....	98	117	110	147	+12	+30	+37	+ .88
Ignorance ....	71	54	74	77	+ 3	+23	+09	+ .68
Talking back .	112	125	110	153	- 2	+28	-.06	+ .82
Crying .....	35	23	30	21	- 5	- 2	-.15	- .06

Table IV shows five items from Test I, the differences in time-in-100 of which (delinquent vs. control) have been divided by their appropriate standard deviations (males: S. D. =

32.69; females: S. D. = 34.01). Standard deviations for all distributions of mean values for times-in-100 are shown in Table V.

TABLE V  
STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF DISTRIBUTIONS OF MEAN TIMES-IN-100 BY SEX  
AND SEPARATE TESTS OF INTEREST-ATTITUDE TESTS  
Standard Deviations

Sex	Test I	Test II	Test III	Test IV
Male .....	32.69	13.18	25.04	25.14
Female .....	34.01	15.34	27.04	27.48

As indicated previously, differentiating characteristics were studied with reference to their similarity for the sexes and their particularization for either sex. The criterion of a differentiating item was that the difference divided by the appropriate sigma should be 1.00 sigma or greater. This criterion is entirely arbitrary.

#### V. Comparative Personality Characteristics by Sex

In conformance with the criterion only four items from Test I differentiate delinquent boys from the control, whereas eighteen (or more than four times as many) differentiate delinquent girls. The items for males together with directional weightings and sigma values are *carrying a revolver* + 1.56,

*gang* + 1.53, *being conceited* - 1.41, *playing cards* + 1.01. The six highest ranking items for delinquent girls in terms of sigma value are *carrying a revolver* + 1.94, *punishment* + 1.85, *arguing* + 1.59, *being shabby* + 1.59, *speeding* + 1.53, *accidents* + 1.50<sup>7</sup>. Two items—*carrying a revolver* and *gang*—were common differentiae for the sexes. Hence, sixteen differentiating items were particularized for female delinquents and two for male delinquents. Six of eighteen differentiating items for female delinquents had sigma values of 1.5 sigma or greater while two of the four differentiating items for male delinquents had sigma values of 1.5 or more. It is clear that delinquent girls react with considerably greater intensity to things

<sup>7</sup> Complete lists of differentiating items are not included in this article. Highest ranking items are given to show something of the general trend.

Anyone wishing complete lists of differentiating items for each sex and each sub-test may have them by communicating with the authors.

considered wrong than do delinquent boys.

From Test II forty-nine items emerged to differentiate male delinquents from the non-delinquent. In the case of female delinquents seventy-four items were differential. Of the 49 which were differential for males 28 items had values of 1.5 sigma or more. Fifty-two of the 74 items differentiating females had values of 1.5 sigma or greater. The skewness of the latter array of differential items toward the higher values of sigma is thus very noticeable. Five highest ranking male items were *jail* + 3.49, *family* + 3.42, *death* + 3.19, *dying* + 2.96, *sins* + 2.80. Ten highest ranking female items were *family* + 5.15, *poison* + 4.17, *disease* + 4.04, *sickness* + 3.78, *knives* + 3.78, *operation* + 3.78, *crimes* + 3.65, *jail* + 3.65, *choking* + 3.58, *wrecks* + 3.52. Forty-nine items from Test II were common differentiaé for the sexes. Hence, while no items were particularized for males, 25 items were particularized for delinquent girls. One conclusion appears warranted: anxieties, fears, and worries differentiate female delinquents from non-delinquents much more drastically than is the case with male delinquents.

In connection with Test III the number of male-female differentiating items did not show the wide difference which has characterized Test I and Test II. Thirty items distinguish the male and 36 items the female delinquent from non-delinquent. Seven of the 30 male items and 15 of the 36 female items had values of 1.5 sigma or greater. Six highest ranking male items were *church* + 2.12, *circus* + 1.92, *movie*

*star* + 1.88, *tap dancing* + 1.60, *joy-riding* + 1.56, *candy* + 1.56. Six highest ranking female items were *bicycling* + 3.00, *rolling skating* + 2.88, *cooking* + 2.84, *children* + 2.37, *clothes* + 2.26, *tap dancing* + 2.03. Eighteen differential items were common to the sexes. Thus, twelve items were particularized for male and eighteen for female delinquents. While not so marked as in Test II, there is yet a noticeable tendency for sigma values of differential items to be of greater magnitude in the case of delinquent girls than delinquent boys.

Twenty-one items for males and 32 for females emerged from Test IV to differentiate the respective delinquent groups from the controls. Seven of the 21 male items had sigma values of 1.5 or over while 14 of 32 female items equalled or exceeded 1.5 sigma. Seven highest ranking male items were *husky* + 1.75, *handsome* + 1.75, *quick* + 1.55, *well-dressed* + 1.55, *cooperative* — 1.51, *wealthy* + 1.51, *good-looking* + 1.51. Seven highest ranking female items were *handsome* + 1.97, *husky* + 1.97, *well-dressed* + 1.78, *kind* + 1.75, *joyful* + 1.71, *lovely* + 1.67, *wealthy* + 1.67. Fifteen items were common to the sexes. Hence, six differentiating items were particularized for males and seventeen for females. Again it is to be noted that in Test IV differential items for delinquent girls skew more definitely toward higher sigma values than differential items for delinquent boys.

As a means of making certain parts of the foregoing descriptive analysis more graphic, Table VI is presented.

TABLE VI

NUMBER OF DIFFERENTIATING ITEMS FOR MALE-FEMALE DELINQUENTS, COVERING FOUR TESTS AND BASED ON VARIATION IN SIGMA VALUES<sup>8</sup>

Sigma Value	Test I		Test II		Test III		Test IV		Total		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
5.0-5.49	..	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	0	1	1
4.5-4.99	..	..	..	0	..	..	..	..	0	0	0
4.0-4.49	..	..	..	2	..	..	..	..	0	2	2
3.5-3.99	..	..	..	7	..	..	..	..	0	7	7
3.0-3.49	..	..	3	8	..	1	..	..	3	9	12
2.5-2.99	..	..	2	9	..	2	..	..	2	11	13
2.0-2.49	..	..	7	15	1	3	..	..	8	18	26
1.5-1.99	2	6	16	10	6	9	7	14	31	39	70
1.0-1.49	2	12	21	22	23	21	14	18	60	73	133
Total	4	18	49	74	30	36	21	32	104	160	264

Certain generalizations are warranted from Table VI. It is evident that female delinquents are differentiated from non-delinquents more definitely by the four tests than male delinquents. Male delinquents are differentiated by 104 items out of a total of 360, or 29 per cent. Female delinquents are differentiated by 160 items or 44 per cent of 360. The difference of 15 per cent has a critical ratio of 4.6. In every test there are more items differential for female than male delinquents. Sigma values tend to range higher for females than males. Test II (worries) is probably the most diagnostic of the four tests in defining differences in personality between delinquents of either sex and non-delinquents, both because of the number of items which differentiate and the range of sigma values.

### VI. Summary

Employing the Pressey Interest-Attitude Tests, male-female groups of delinquents have been compared with norms for non-delinquents. Items were ascertained from each of the four sub-tests which differentiate delinquent boys and delinquent girls from the control. In terms of an arbitrary statistical criterion certain differentiating items were found from each of the four sub-tests which, on the one hand, are common to the sexes, and on the other particularized for one or the other of the sexes. In three sub-tests more items were particularized for females than males. In general, Test II (worries) appears to be the most diagnostic of the four sub-tests. Considering the total number of differentiating items from the four sub-tests a significant difference between the sexes was found, the critical ratio being weighted toward female delinquents.

<sup>8</sup> It should be understood that differential items are empirically derived, adopting a sigma value of 1.00 or greater, being an arbitrary criterion. It is entirely possible that certain items would be found *not to* differentiate if the selection were

made by conventional statistical methods of computing reliability of differences. That is, if ordinary reliability formulae had been used, certain differences would have been found to be *not true* differences.