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RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGY TO THE STUDY OF CRIMINOGENESIS*

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The recent record of psychological research in criminogenesis brings into sharp focus the statement of Reckless (31) concerning the three phases in the study of the etiology of criminal behavior. Phase one, with theories and speculation based on data which was usually inadequate, is closed. Phase two, the period of first hand research and segmented studies, is overlapping phase three, the period of reformulation. Advancement in this research has not been orderly and the reformulation, partly as a result of this disorder, is developing slowly, but with great promise in a few significant instances. Other reasons for its slow development are well stated by Corsini (11). In listing the services performed by prison psychologists in order of time spent, individual research ranked fifth, with research direction and supervision ranking eleventh. He explains that the relatively low position of what should be a major contribution of psychologists is due to the evident fact that research does not benefit the institution immediately and directly, and therefore is not always appreciated, and rarely encouraged. Classification, screening for rehabilitation, and vocational testing, along with personality evaluation, are the important but less cause-finding fields which consume the energy of correctional psychologists. Gurvitz (19) and Martin (26) outline the elaborate psychometric procedures and vocational guidance test batteries which are proving themselves valuable in the Federal Prison System and the Department of Corrections of California, respectively. Cason (6) has developed a personality scale for special use with prisoners, which should be a valuable research instrument. Of special interest is the response to a list of questions prepared by Corsini (9) for fifty prisoners seen consecutively at their reorientation interview after a release date had been set. In answer to the question about needed changes in the prison, they stated that psychological and psychiatric assistance were most needed. It was also reported that the inmates

* Digits in parentheses refer to the bibliography at the end of the article.

tend to accept blame for their crimes rather than to put the blame on outside causes. This confirms Weir's (35) conclusion on the same point.

Several studies representing the waning second phase mentioned above have compared various factors in specific criminal classifications with the prison population in general. Clark (8) administered the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory to 100 AWOL recidivists and non-recidivists. Tetrachoric "r" showed no significant relations between the MMPI sub-scale scores and recidivism. However, certain items from the Pd (psychopathic deviate) and Ma (hypomanic) scales appeared to have discriminative value. Twenty-five white males at Virginia State Penitentiary who had scored severely retarded on the 1937 Binet, Form L or the Wechsler-Bellevue were studied by Grigg (18). He concluded that severely retarded criminals get into crime because of impulsive reactions to momentary stimuli. They are more impulsive in interpersonal relations than is the general criminal population. Hovey (21) compared 50 maladjusted recidivists at the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners, Springfield, Missouri, with 50 well adjusted first offenders. Historical information was gathered through interviews with the prisoners, from relatives, acquaintances and social agencies. Seventy behavior items were selected and weighted according to their frequency of occurrence in the maladjusted group. The main conclusions from an analysis of the data indicated that occupationally unstable recidivists were quite likely to have additional personality or character inadequacies and that the psychopaths studied seem to have had a relatively characteristic pattern of development from infancy.

The State Prison of Southern Michigan was the source of a series of studies by Berg. Four hundred and eighty inmates sentenced between January 1, 1940 and August 1, 1942 served as a random sample control group. Grade Placement, IQ and age of the control group were compared with the same factors in groups of 475 car thieves (1), 135 forgers (2) and 479 sex offenders (3) admitted to the prison during the same period. Grade placement was measured by the Stanford Achievement Test and IQ by the Bregman Revision of the Army Alpha. The mean IQ of the control group was 89.1. It is important to bear in mind that the mean IQ of the general population by this test is 89, which corresponds to a Binet IQ of 100. Car thieves proved to be higher in intelligence, higher in scholastic achievement and younger than the control group. Other evidence indicated that car theft is a crime of impulse. Forgers had a mean Bregman IQ of 99.4 which is comparable to placement in the superior group. Grade placement and age were also higher than the general prison population.

Hope for rehabilitation of forgers is less, inasmuch as they show a rate of recidivism double that of other prisoners. The sex offense group was significantly older, with nearly equal grade placement but with lower IQ than the control group. This suggests that in this group a deterioration process may be operative.

Using the same control group, Berg and Fox (4) reported that 200 males convicted of first and second degree murder were significantly higher in age and significantly lower in grade placement and IQ. However, analysis of their figures reveals that there is no significant difference from the controls in the scores of 113 white murderers in grade placement and IQ. Their mean IQ was 88.0 against the control mean of 89.1 and mean grade placement was the same at 5.2. The entire difference is accounted for by 82 Negroes with mean grade placement of 3.5 and mean IQ 77.4. Other factors such as ego-involvement or non-ego-involvement, violence or non-violence, previous record of assaultiveness, and sex of the victim were also investigated. It was found that those who killed females were significantly older than those who killed males; that those who killed females had more cases with violence and ego-involvement; that younger men murder for economic gain or to avenge an insult; that the record showed twice as many previous assaultive crimes in the Negro histories.

At the same institution Fox (13) took all inmates present on one random day and tabulated race, age and IQ at time of commitment under specific crimes such as burglary, larceny, homicide, etc. All assaultive crimes showed a significantly lower intelligence level; conspiracy, forgery, and robbery a level significantly higher than the group mean. Older men's thefts were involved in business or politics, while burglary, kidnapping, robbery and auto theft were committed by men younger than the group mean. With the exception of kidnapping and sex offenses, the Negro group represented the greater risk as far as violence was concerned. Fox states that these conclusions do not present new ideas, but that for the first time they are verified by significant statistical differences. Unfortunately, his conclusions are open to the same doubt regarding the accuracy of the results for intelligence as the study reported immediately above because of the failure to consider the influence of the low mean IQ of the Negro group.

In a survey of 500 psychopathic prisoners discharged from the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners, Springfield, Missouri, Cason and Pescor (7) found the following significant factors: that the continuity of the parental home had been disrupted before the 18th birthday; that as a child the subjects had been headstrong, willful, difficult to manage or

in frequent mischief; that they did not take religion seriously; that a smaller percentage had been married but a higher percentage divorced than the average of general prisoners or civilians. Also at Springfield, Ostow and Ostow (29) recorded brain waves and reported that the occurrence of bisynchronous paroxysmal discharge was greater among the prisoners than in the general population. They further state that this type of response is frequent with personality traits conducive to anti-social behavior. It is suggested that the presence of these waves indicates subcortical or metabolic dysfunction. However these results are not corroborated by Gibbs, Bagchi and Bloomberg (16), who compared the records of 452 criminals and 1432 controls. They concluded that when age and errors of sampling are controlled there were no significant differences in EEG (electroencephalographic) recordings.

A study of serial position in the family of 300 consecutive admissions to the Virginia State Penitentiary by Shield and Grigg (33) found that extreme ordinal position—first, last or only child—was present in white prisoners in 50 percent of the cases in crimes against property and 46.6 percent in crimes against persons. Negroes gave percentages of 67.6 and 63, respectively. All these percentages are higher than chance expectancy. Extreme ordinal position appears to be at least a contributing factor in criminal activity.

Representative of a number of studies with military offenders, matched groups of AWOL and non-AWOL trainees were rated by Feldman and Maleski (12). Maladjustment in pre-army life, habits of fleeing from unpleasant situations somatic complaints and aggression differentiated the AWOL group.

The majority of the above investigations have been concerned with factors which are not usually considered to be dynamic traits of personality. In addition, many of them have attempted to differentiate one group of prisoners from another rather than to set forth the characteristics that mark the criminal as different from the non-criminal. Let us now attend to the type of research which aims closer to the apparent heart of the problem of criminogenesis, and to studies that have used projective techniques and other special skills of the clinical psychologist to good advantage.

The confusion of reports on the intelligence of criminals which is mentioned by Metfessel and Lovell (27) is clarified by Schmidt (32). Twelve years of testing using group intelligence tests at San Quentin showed a mean IQ of 85 for 19,241 prisoners. 37 percent were classified as borderline or defective. To check the disparity of these results with the impression of the clinicians, the Wechsler-Bellevue Adult Intelligence

Scale was introduced. Results show clearly that the range of intelligence of the prison inmates is similar to that of the population at large. Ordinary group tests of intelligence are not adequate in the prison situation because of the lack of recent experience of most of the subjects in thinking in paper and pencil situations. The confusion in regard to the relative incidence of feeble-mindedness among criminals has been due in a large measure to the kind of testing instrument used.

A further refinement of the use of the Wechsler-Bellevue is the analysis of the pattern of scatter on the sub-test scores. Machover (25) developed a regression equation to measure differences in pattern between criminals and non-criminals. A multiple correlation of .439 was obtained between predicted compound scores and group status, criminal—non-criminal. He considers the obtained differentiation to be associated with environmental differences effective within a broadly homogeneous social matrix, and with personality differences which may in turn have resulted from these environmental differences.

Lodge (24) applied Thurstone's bisected variable tetrachoric method in an exploratory survey among various characteristics of prisoners studied at the Cleveland Criminal Courts Psychiatric Clinic. He attempted to delineate some of the significant relationships prevailing in certain areas of criminal behavior. He set out to examine methodically diverse characteristics prevailing in a criminal group and to determine if possible in an entirely empirical way whether there are any patterns in the psycho-social structure of the group. A table of inter-correlations was established among criminal traits and correlation profiles were constructed for each of a number of selected key variables. This method has proved conclusively that criminality is not an isolated phenomena, but that it is inextricably a part of the total psycho-social organism. The concept is not a new one, but this is a definite objective demonstration of its reality.

The Bernreuter Personality Inventory was administered to 50 Elmira inmates of superior mental ability. The test was given by Corsini (10) in an individual setting under optimal conditions for securing the subject's cooperation. These men are significantly higher on the neurotic scale than the general norms and they score extremely high in self consciousness (feeling inferior).

Pescor (30) used the Woodworth Personal Data Sheet as part of a routine examination for 800 cases at the U.S. Northeastern Penitentiary Hospital. This test is designed to bring out not only psychoneurotic symptoms, but also pertinent points in the patient's family history, past medical history, childhood environment and reaction to childhood en-

vironment. It was shown that adult delinquents are apparently given to worries; do not have a well developed sense of humor; complain of bodily pain (principally sacro-iliac region) and are apt to give a history of juvenile incorrigibility.

Attempting to develop a valid technique for the group administration of the Rorschach Test by means of slide projection, Harrower-Erickson (20) worked with 40 subjects at Sing Sing. Half were sex offenders and half a heterogeneous group. No "criminal personality" on the whole was found nor was there a typical pattern for any particular crime. The majority showed considerable deviation from the normal but this took a variety of forms. The sex offender yielded the more disturbed personality patterns. There was a marked predominance of the more primitive type of emotional responses. Here again the sex group was more deviant.

Fifty adult psychopaths screened to exclude defective intelligence, neurosis or psychosis were selected by Geil (15) from the Psychopathic Unit of the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners, Springfield, Missouri. They responded to the Rorschach blots in a way which closely approximated that found to be characteristic at a pre-adolescent stage of personality development. Another study by Geil (14) at Springfield reports the results of administering the Goodenough Draw-a-Man test. Scoring of over 3000 drawings showed a preponderance of child-like primitivity over adult maturity. He suggests that it might be a good screening test to select those who would benefit from psychotherapy.

These studies are representative of what is being done with the various psychological techniques. No attempt has been made to include any of the numerous individual case analyses which appear so frequently in the various journals devoted to the field. Most of them belong to psychiatry rather than psychology. Lindner, who has done sound basic research on the psychopath (22) is responsible for one of the outstanding exceptions through his work with hypnoanalysis (23). His stenographic record of the entire analysis of a criminal psychopath has been called one of the most significant milestones in the entire history of psychopathology. Although we may not agree with the extremity of this statement, the fact that the so-called incurable psychopath has been brought within the scope of therapy is a significant forward step.

What, then, is the present status of psychological thinking regarding criminogenesis? Perhaps we may best answer this question by a series of pertinent quotations from recent writings:

Yepsen (36):

"The individual is not an offender because of any one characteristic. . . . It is safe

to conclude that there is an imbalance between his ability, his reaction type, his learned reactions, his fundamental drives and the situation in which he finds himself."

Brown and Orr (5):

"There are relatively few students of criminal behavior today, who would take the position that criminal behavior is due solely to 'an atavistic biological constitution, arising on a heredity basis' as was Lombroso's early opinion, or the position of the naive environmentalists that all criminal behavior is due to growing up in 'delinquency areas' or even to the position of some of the psychopathologists, that all criminal behavior comes about through the resolution of unconscious emotional conflicts, chiefly centering around the experiences of the family drama . . . the only way in which the problems of criminal behavior can be adequately discussed is in terms of a 'field theory,' in which the biological, psychological and cultural factors all play integral parts."

Thorpe (34):

"It can be concluded . . . that the majority of delinquents and criminals are individuals experiencing serious difficulties . . . they are relatively typical individuals who are in most respects similar to the general population, but who are experiencing more or less severe stress producing personality problems."

McGinnis (28):

"The modern trend in psychology as it applies to the offender is to stress not low intelligence nor the gross physical, economic or social circumstances of the individual's life, but the more subtle aspects of the individual's emotional life: his feelings of security or its lack; his desire for personal recognition, affection and attention; feelings of rejection, inadequacy or jealousy; unhappiness about family problems; and other sources of mental conflict."

Metfessel and Lovell (27):

"A general conclusion from this series of studies—representative of many others—is that test results show offenders to be inferior in many aspects of personality as illustrated by their emphasis on worry, their high scores on tests of neurotic tendency, and their retardation on tests of social maturity. . . . Differences have also been found between the test scores of offenders of varying degrees. . . . However, so great is the overlapping in all of these cases that no clear cut picture of a criminal personality can be drawn."

There is one study which appears to verify all of the above opinions and corroborates most of the above experimental findings. Gillin (17) took the prisoner in the Wisconsin State Prison and considered him in terms of the crime for which he was sentenced and in terms of the various social and economic experiences he had from birth to the time of his incarceration. He synthesized several approaches to furnish an interpretation of the interplay of various factors. Four hundred and eighty-six prisoners were studied; 92 were murderers; 128 were sodomists and rapists; 266 were property offenders.

Data was gathered from prison records, lengthy personal interviews, life histories written by the subjects according to a mimeographed outline, and from field investigators who made a thorough check of the people and places in the prisoner's past life. A similar fund of information was gathered about the brothers of 172 prisoners. They served as a control group.

The data was subjected to a two-fold treatment, statistical computation and case history analysis. Differences between several types of offenders and between prisoners and their brothers were tabulated and the significance of the differences calculated. Contingency coefficients were computed to show the relationship between various categories of conditions affecting the prisoner and the type of offender. The problem was to discover which of the differences between the several classes of offenders were functionally connected with the crime committed. This relationship was suggested by the case histories which revealed more clearly how certain conditions prepared the men for their later careers.

Both the statistical tables and the case histories revealed that the backgrounds of murderers and property offenders were similar, and that both were different from the background of the sex offender. The personalities of the sex offenders were likewise different from those of the other two classes.

Economic conditions, good or bad, were found to affect conduct only as they provide or relieve one of the strains which test a person's habitual responses to life and his emotional stability. Proved to be fallacious was the once prevalent notion that the mentally deficient are naturally disposed to criminality. In some cases the organic constitution was more important, in others, life experiences.

Gillin states that the most common and probably most potent factor was unresolved emotional disturbance. In this respect prisoners differed from their brothers. Also, as a group the prisoners departed from the accepted pattern of conduct, even aside from delinquency, more than did their brothers. Rather early in life, especially during adolescence, the prisoners had developed a pattern of reactions to life's situations which ultimately resulted in an unstable economic career and inharmonious domestic life. They did not strike roots economically and socially which would have helped to guard them against delinquency. Almost all of them had been subjected at some time in their lives to some treatment from parent, step parent, foster parent, brother, sister, playmate, teacher, sweetheart, wife or business associate which had wounded their "*amour propre*." When their emotional security was threatened they tended to develop, if without proper guidance, an undesirable pattern of response to social situations.

Gillin concludes that this study clearly demonstrates that human motivation is not the result of any single circumstance or set of circumstances. But no study has yet determined what weight should be attached to the various conditions that determine anti-social, or for that matter, socially approved conduct. The difficulty can be resolved only by continued study

of all the possible factors with every refinement of technique that can be devised.

THE WAY AHEAD

Where then, is the proper path for future criminogenic research? Clearly, the only chance of success lies in an interdisciplinary cooperation to an extent that has been previously unknown. A few things seem now to be definite. Further studies on the influence of intelligence are hardly necessary. The weight of evidence indicates that the distribution of prisoner and non-prisoner populations are almost completely superimposed. Studies according to crime categories alone will not be fruitful. These categories are legalistic pigeonholes that have no true relationship to various factors in basic motivation. Studies of gross socio-economic conditions are more valuable to the political propagandists for misinterpretation of their significance than to criminologists who are seeking real causes.

The sharpest spur to productive work would be a workable, understandable and universally applicable concept of what is criminal activity. The legalistic concept has already been dismissed. The cultural concept appears confusing to a few. Perhaps a simple psychological concept, evolved from and similar to the cultural concept is the answer. Why not accept a concept of a criminal act as anything which violates the fundamental rights of another person or group. This does not depend on law, and it is flexible to cultural variation. It is a personal concept just as the criminal act is personal. It can be reduced to simple elements, namely, the lack of recognition of another's right or the failure to respect it. On this basis the criminal act is clearly an egocentric act, which is in turn an immature act. Set the goal of our research to discover what are the factors which either by negation or omission result in the absence of unselfish maturity in the human personality. This is not an oversimplification, for we do not expect a unidimensional answer to our problem. It is merely a necessary clarification of the goal before us to enable us to plan research, to find facts and to establish a true science.

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