

1954

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### Recommended Citation

Russell N. Cassel, The Relationship of Certain Factors to the Level of Aspiration and Social Distance for Forty-Four Air Force Prisoners, 44 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 604 (1953-1954)

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# THE RELATIONSHIP OF CERTAIN FACTORS TO THE LEVEL OF ASPIRATION AND SOCIAL DISTANCE FOR FORTY-FOUR AIR FORCE PRISONERS

Russell N. Cassel

An important aspect of this study is a comparison between Air Force prisoners and civilian delinquent boys in one of the California schools for delinquent boys as indicated in Table II.

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This study is concerned with a psychological analysis of the relationship of certain factors in the life of the individual to the Level of Aspiration "D"-Score,<sup>1</sup> and the Social Distance Index<sup>2</sup> for forty-four Air Force prisoners selected from one of the Air Force base stockades in the central part of the United States during July 1953. These prisoners constituted the total population of the stockade except for eight "maximum custody" and two newly arrived prisoners; the former being excluded because they were believed to be too uncooperative for valid group test results, and the latter because they did not know the other members of the group sufficiently well to determine their Social Distance Index.

There were three main objectives for the study: first, to obtain objective psychological data which would aid the prison officer to better understand the personality structure of the general Air Force prisoner; second, to furnish reliable data for the effective security classification of prisoners; and third, to facilitate effective classification of prisoners for ultimate disposition.

With respect to the first objective, understanding the personality structure of the general Air Force prisoner, it has been the contention of many "retraining officers" (prison) in the Air Force that fewer than 13 percent of the routine Air Force prisoners have been committed to the stockade as a result of offenses which would result in similar action under civil law; thus they maintain that the Air Force prisoner is not

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1. A measure of the degree of difference between the world as the individual perceives it and the world as it really is.

2. A measure of the degree of popularity of an individual with members of his own group as perceived by those members.

characterized by the typical delinquent personality. In this respect, only three of the prisoners involved in this study were committed on the bases of offenses which result in similar action under the civil code, i.e., two for larceny, and one for assault. All forty-one others were found guilty of repeated Absence Without Leave (AWOL) from their Air Force Units.

Relative to the second objective, security classification of prisoners, it is the responsibility of the prison officer in all Air Force stockades to classify each prisoner admitted on the basis of the anticipated security risk which he presents. Four different degrees of security classification are utilized: (1) maximum security—for serious offenders and uncooperative individuals; (2) medium security—for less serious offenders than homicide and aggravated assaults, and for individuals demonstrating an unwillingness under a minimum of direction and supervision; (3) minimum security—for individuals who demonstrate a willingness to cooperate under a minimum of direction and supervision; and (4) parolees—individuals with minimum sentences, or near the end of longer sentences for cooperative prisoners.

On the third objective for this study—ultimate disposition of prisoners—it is to be remembered that the local base stockade is used for all sentences of less than six months duration and as a temporary expedient for all offenses. Final disposition of all Air Force prisoners with sentences greater than six months duration is made in four general ways: (1) Federal Penitentiary—for those individuals who have been convicted of offenses which would be classified as felonies under civil law in either civil or military courts; (2) Military Disciplinary Barracks—for individuals who have been convicted of serious offenses under military code and in military courts; (3) Consolidated Air Force Retraining Centers—for individuals where punitive discharges are not planned, and where facilities are available for the retraining of individuals who are on a temporary duty status from their parent unit; and<sup>3</sup> the Air Force Retraining Center, at Amarillo, Texas—for individuals for whom punitive discharges are planned, but because they express a desire to remain in the service an opportunity is provided for them to demonstrate their amenability for retraining, and for possible restoration to duty. The first two classifications are the results of action by the court having jurisdiction; while the latter two are based on the recommendations of the retraining personnel, and the facilities available.

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3. NEUMEYER, M. H., *JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN MODERN SOCIETY*. New York: D. Van Nostrand, Inc., 1952.

The age of the prisoners involved in this study ranged from 17 to 40 years, with a mean age of 22.9 years. The last grade of school successfully completed ranged from third grade through high school graduation, with a mean grade of 9.3 years, or a beginning sophomore in high school; only four of them had actually graduated from high school, less than one percent of the total. Twenty-five of the 44 were single; 19 were married. Many of the individuals who were separated or living estranged from their wives and families at the time of conviction. Only two of the prisoners indicated that their fathers' occupation could be classified as high as the semi-professional or professional levels; most of their fathers were farmers and laborers.

One psychological test and two separate rating techniques were utilized in this study. The test was "The Cassel Group Level of Aspiration Test."<sup>4</sup> The two rating techniques were: A Social Distance Index,<sup>5</sup> and an Occupational Hierarchy Scale.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE CASSEL GROUP LEVEL OF ASPIRATION TEST (CGAT)

The CGAT was administered using the "Short-Form Administration" described in literature subsequent to publication of the manual.<sup>7</sup> Under this administration, only eight of the twelve parts of the test are administered and scored—thus requiring only four minutes of actual testing time. The middle four parts of the tests (parts V, VI, VII, & VIII) were not used. The test was administered to the entire group at one sitting with the Air Force Retraining Personnel serving as test proctors. All four of the major indices of the test described in the manual were scored and utilized.

#### THE SOCIAL DISTANCE INDEX (SDI)

The SDI is an improvised score which provides a single quantitative index for the social distance of each individual.<sup>8</sup> A 3"x5" ruled card was passed out to each prisoner by the Retraining Officer, as had been prearranged with the author. The Retraining Officer had an excellent background in retraining procedures, and cooperated previously with the author in the conduct of college courses in the area of prison theory.) The prisoners were instructed that future plans might involve working

4. CASSEL, R. N., *MANUAL AND CASSEL GROUP LEVEL OF ASPIRATION TESTS* Box 775, Beverly Hills, California: Western Psychological Services, 1952.

5. *Loc. cit.* n. 1.

6. *Loc. cit.* n. 2.

7. CASSEL, R. N., and SAUGSTAD, R. C., *Level of Aspiration and Sociometric Distance*, *SOCIOMETRY*, August-November, 1952, Vol. XV, No. 3-4, p. 319.

8. TERMAN, L. M., and MERRILL, MAUD A., *Measuring INTELLIGENCE*. New York: Mifflin Co., 1937, p. 48.

and living together from time-to-time on the part of many of the prisoners and that each one was to indicate his first three choices of fellow prisoners whom he desired to be assigned to work or live with. It was admitted that circumstances might prevent stockade authorities from assigning an individual to work or live with one of these three choices, but it was further requested that they would turn the card over on the other side and indicate any of the fellow prisoners with whom they particularly did not want to work or live with. Weights were assigned to each of these choices on the following order: 1st choice, five points, 2nd choice, three points, 3rd choice, one point, and negative choices minus three points each. The SDI was the algebraic sum of these choices for each individual involved.

### OCCUPATIONAL HIERARCHY SCALE (OH)

Each individual was asked to indicate the particular occupation in which his father was gainfully employed during the past three years; or (if the father was deceased) during the last three years of his life. Where the individuals failed to indicate their father's occupation, it was secured through a personal interview. A scale similar to that described by Dr. Lewis A. Terman was used to determine the "socio-economic level of the home" from which the prisoner came:<sup>9</sup> I—Professional; II—Semi-professional; III—Clerical, Skilled Trades, and Retail Business; IV—Rural Owners; V—Semiskilled, Minor Clerical, and Minor Business; VI—Laborers, and Unskilled Workers.

### FINDINGS

The main objective of this study was to determine the relationship of certain factors to the Level of Aspiration "D"-Score, and the Social Distance Index. Factors included in this investigation were: Chronological age, last school grade achieved, being married or single, and prison security classification. In Table I we have indicated the relationship of these factors with the Level of Aspiration "D"-Score from the CGAT. For the first three indices, the paired variables were ranked and the Spearman Ranks Difference formula was utilized; for the latter three, the Bi-Serial Correlation technique was employed. Only one of these relationships appears to have statistical significance, the relationship of the prison security classification to the level of aspiration "D"-Score; this was significant at the five percent level of confidence, and could not be expected to have occurred by chance. Individuals with the

9. Loc. cit. n. 3.

greatest indicated prison security risk tend to have the highest level of aspiration, and the largest "D"-Score.

TABLE I  
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LEVEL OF ASPIRATION "D"-SCORE FROM THE CGAT AND CERTAIN OTHER VARIABLES FOR FORTY-FOUR AIR FORCE PRISONERS, USING RHO (Ranks Difference) AND BI-SERIAL METHODS OF CORRELATION.

Variables	Correlation Method	Index of Correlation	Standard Error
1. Level of Aspiration "D"-score and Chronological Age (N-44).....	Rho	.116	±.159
2. Level of Aspiration "D"-Score and Last School Grade Achieved (N-44).....	Rho	-.075	±.158
3. Level of Aspiration "D"-Score and Social Distance Index (N-44).....	Rho	-.003	±.158
4. Level of Aspiration "D"-Score and being Married or Single (N-44)	r <sub>bis.</sub>	.048	±.181
5. Level of Aspiration "D"-Score and Occupational level of Father (N-44).....	r <sub>bis.</sub>	.063	±.101
6. Level of Aspiration "D"-Score and Prison Security Classification (N-44)*.....	r <sub>bis.</sub>	.262	±.107

\* Significant at the 5 percent level of confidence.

In Table II similar relationships are indicated between the same factors described for Table I with the Social Distance Index. None of these relationships appear to be statistically significant.

TABLE II  
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE SOCIAL DISTANCE INDEX AND CERTAIN OTHER VARIABLES FOR FORTY-FOUR AIR FORCE PRISONERS, USING RHO (Ranks Difference) AND BI-SERIAL METHODS OF CORRELATION.

Variables	Correlation Method	Index of Correlation	Standard Error
1. Social Distance Index and Chronological Age (N-44) .....	Rho	.066	±.16
2. Social Distance Index and Last School Grade Achieved (N-44).....	Rho	.08	±.16
3. Social Distance Index and being Married or Single (N-44).....	r <sub>bis.</sub>	.04	±.18
4. Social Distance Index and Occupational Level of Father (N-44).....	r <sub>bis.</sub>	.212	±.19
5. Social Distance Index and Prison Security Classification (N-44).....	r <sub>bis.</sub>	.004	±.16

In Table III comparisons are made of the four standard scores described in the CGAT Manual (1 Unstructured first goal, 2 Mean "D"-Score, 3 Psychological response to failure, and 4 Physiological response to failure) between the Air Force prisoners, and a group of delinquent boys in a California Retraining School for Boys; also, a group of typical

high school seniors of about equally divided boys and girls from California (Data compiled in the initial standardization of the CGAT, much of which is recorded in the Manual<sup>10</sup> described previously). In the top portion of the table scores are indicated for each of the three groups; while in the lower portion data relative to the significance of difference between General Air Force prisoners and each of these two groups is shown.

TABLE III

A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FORTY-FOUR GENERAL AIR FORCE PRISONERS AND A GROUP OF CIVILIAN DELINQUENTS FROM A CALIFORNIA SCHOOL FOR DELINQUENT BOYS; ALSO, WITH A GROUP OF TYPICAL HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS ON THE FOUR SCORES FROM THE CGAT.

Groups	Scores	Initial Unstructured Goal (a)	Mean Aspiration "D"-Score (b)	Psychological Response to Failure (c)	Physiological Response to Failure (d)
1. Forty-four General Air Force Prisoners:					
	Mean .....	27.0	2.1	0.9	0.6
	Stand. Dev. (SD).....	11.0	2.6	2.4	1.6
2. Two hundred forty-seven boys from a California School for Delinquent Boys:					
	Mean .....	49.7	5.69	4.03	1.51
	SD .....	20.5	5.01	4.6	4.0
3. Two hundred ninety-eight boys and girls from the senior class of a typical California high school:					
	Mean .....	35.95	2.78	4.21	1.4
	SD .....	7.5	1.65	2.7	2.0

## COMPARISONS OF SCORES FOR THE AIR FORCE PRISONERS WITH:

Scores	CIVILIAN DELINQUENT BOYS				HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS			
	1 & 2 of (a)	1 & 2 of (b)	1 & 2 of (c)	1 & 2 of (d)	1 & 3 of (a)	1 & 3 of (b)	1 & 3 of (c)	1 & 3 of (d)
Differences between:								
Mean .....	16.1	3.6	3.1	0.9	8.85	0.68	3.3	0.8
SD .....	9.5	2.41	2.2	2.4	3.5	0.95	0.3	0.4
Critical Ratios (CR's):								
Mean .....	7.6	7.2	7.1	0.8	5.5	0.7	2.3	3.0
SD .....	6.3	7.5	15.4	3.3	2.9	2.3	1.1	2.1

An inspection of these scores indicates that the personality of the Air Force prisoner, as indicated by the scores from the CGAT, is more nearly like that of the typical high school senior than of delinquent boys in civilian institutions. It should be noted that the main score of the CGAT (the Mean Aspiration "D"-Score) shows no significant difference from high school seniors. There is a significant difference, however, with the delinquent boys in civilian schools, the critical ratios (CR's) for both the mean and standard deviation differences are well

10. Loc. cit. n. 7.

beyond the one percent level of confidence and could not be expected to have occurred by chance.

Recent studies have indicated that an important variable in the personality of delinquent individuals is their amenability to barriers present in the social climate. In this respect, our Air Force prisoners have been committed largely on the bases of repeated AWOL offenses. These appear to be direct manifestations of this important variable in delinquent personalities.<sup>11</sup> The fact that only four of the prisoners graduated from high school indicate their empirical resistance to school barriers. To this extent, but to a lesser degree than civilian prisoners, the General Air Force prisoner appears to manifest the characteristic pattern of the delinquent personality.

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11. GLUECK, S., and GLUECK, ELEANOR, *CRIMINAL CAREERS IN RETROSPECT*. New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1943.