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## THE 'GOOD' BOY IN A HIGH DELINQUENCY AREA

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Although the existence of the non-delinquent boy in a high delinquency area has tacitly been recognized by sociologists, social workers and others, the greatest emphasis has traditionally been placed on the study, treatment and prevention of the small quota of boys in a high delinquency area who experience contact with the police and juvenile court. Many previous investigations have, of course, studied or compared matched and non-matched groups of delinquents and non-delinquents on a variety of social and psychological variables. None has been solely concerned, however, with those youths, who, though often handicapped by home background, area of residence, deviant companions and the many other so-called causes of delinquency, manage to steer a course away from delinquent behavior.

The present study, based on a new approach to the problem of delinquency, focuses on those aspects of the socialization process which enables persons, in even the areas of highest delinquency, to internalize non-deviant attitudes and behavior patterns. This unique departure should help fill the void in many of the existing sociological theories of criminality which, by almost wholly ignoring the behavior of the non-criminal, fail to explain adequately the violational conduct of the delinquent. It has long been axiomatic that any general theory of criminality must also be a general theory of non-criminality. This study, in effect, is a pilot attempt to examine the social processing of those persons who do not conform to the expectations of current theory.

### METHODOLOGY

On the basis of previous research, 16 of the 61 census tracts in Columbus, Ohio, were selected for study as areas of high white delinquency.<sup>1</sup> The delinquency rate in these tracts ranged from 20 per 1000 boys, aged 10 to 17, to well over 40 per 1000. Seven of these tracts were among the 15 highest in the city in total delinquency

\* This study was made possible by a grant from The Ohio State University Development Fund.

<sup>1</sup> JOHN S. ELY, *An Ecological Study of Juvenile Delinquency in Franklin County*, Master's Thesis, Ohio State University, 1952.

rates. A breakdown of these 16 tracts by dwelling area characteristics indicated that three could be classified as average, six as below average and seven as among the poorest in the city.

With the physical area delineated, permission was sought and obtained from the Board of Education to approach all sixth grade teachers in the 15 schools located in these high delinquency tracts. Statistics indicate that sixth-graders, approximately 12 years of age, represent the threshold age group for entry into delinquency. In Columbus, at least, the delinquency rate doubles between the ages of 11 and 12.<sup>2</sup> Sixth grade teachers are consequently in an excellent position not only to observe the development of their students but to detect and differentiate those who are slanted toward law abidance and those slanted toward delinquency.

In an interview, each sixth grade teacher was asked to nominate those students in her school room who would not, in her opinion, ever experience police or juvenile court contact. Treating each nominee separately, she was then requested to indicate the criteria or reasons for the selection of this particular boy. As a means of independently corroborating the judgment of the teachers, each nominee and his family were checked through the police department and juvenile court files. After eliminating those boys with any type of police or court contact, the mother or mother-surrogate of each nominee was interviewed with an open-ended schedule. The purpose of this interview was to determine the developmental history of the boy, his patterns of association and interaction and family situation. At the same time, the boy was asked to fill out a structured schedule containing scales measuring delinquency proneness, social responsibility and occupational and aspirational desires. In addition, a fourth instrument sought to arrive at his conception of himself, his family and of his other interpersonal relations.

The delinquency proneness (De)<sup>3</sup> and social responsibility (Re)<sup>4</sup> scales are both part of the Gough California Psychological Inventory. The former has been widely used with delinquent and non-delinquent populations and found to have predictive value with reference to delinquent behavior. In both of these instruments a few items were eliminated in order to make these scales meaningful to a 12 year old population group. The scoring procedure was standardized through the use of a correction factor. Following the suggestion of Gough, a third score, based on the combined scores on the De and Re scales, was also incorporated.

The third instrument concentrated on occupational and aspirational desires and

<sup>2</sup> Ely, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> The essential purpose of the delinquency proneness scale is to measure the effectiveness of the socialization process as regards delinquent conduct. See, HARRISON G. GOUGH, *Systematic Validation of a Test for Delinquency*, reprint of a paper delivered at the annual meetings of the American Psychological Association, Sept. 2, 1954, in New York City; HARRISON G. GOUGH AND DONALD PETERSON, *The Identification and Measurement of Predispositional Factors in Crime and Delinquency*, *JOUR. OF CONSULTING PSYCHOL.*, 16: 207-212, 1952; AND HARRISON G. GOUGH, *A Sociological Theory of Psychopathy*, *AMER. JOUR. OF SOCIOLOGY*, 53: 359-366, 1948.

<sup>4</sup> In personal correspondence with us, Dr. Gough suggested the inclusion of the social responsibility scale because "it offers a partial index of the 'social control' factor in personality . . . (and) an index of delinquency proneness based upon both scales would be a better measure for your study." Both the delinquency and social responsibility scales were used with Dr. Gough's expressed permission and consent.

was developed by Morlock in his study of juvenile vulnerability to delinquency.<sup>5</sup> In that study, he found certain occupational choices to be significantly related to high vulnerability to delinquency.

The fourth measure was derived largely, though not exclusively, from the Glueck findings in their *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* study.<sup>6</sup> It contained items on parental discipline, punishment, attention and affection as well as the boy's evaluation of himself and his family and friends.

#### FINDINGS

Initial nominations and evaluations of white boys thought to be "insulated" against delinquency were obtained from all sixth grade teachers in schools located in the high delinquency tracts. The 30 sixth-grade teachers nominated 192 students or approximately 52 percent of the white boys in their classes. The range of teacher nominations varied from 15 to 100 percent of the eligible students with an average of 6.4 boys per class.

In addition, these 30 teachers listed a total of 1,033 reasons for selecting the 192 boys, an average of over five reasons per boy. The criteria of selection of the "insulated" boys were largely of a conventional nature and varied significantly among the teachers. See Table I. In all, 45 percent of the reasons specified by the teachers could be classified as pertaining to favorable personal characteristics, attitudes and interests. Over 27 percent of the reasons included one or more aspects of a favorable home situation. Approximately 21 percent could be more or less evenly divided into participation in character-building organizations, religious activities, school behavior, remunerative after school employment and non-delinquent companions. In addition, and undoubtedly the most interesting of all the reasons offered, were those which might be classed as being of a negative character. By this is meant that the boy was regarded by his teacher as being so overly timid, naive, immature or overprotected as to preclude his engaging in delinquent conduct. Thus, the personal or social shortcomings of these students could be construed as favorable non-delinquency factors. These negative evaluations, as a result, tend to cast serious doubt on the assertions of some school critics that to his teacher the "good" boy is merely the one who is quiet, submissive and rarely troublesome.

How valid were these teacher nominations and evaluations? A check of the police and juvenile court records revealed that 16 of the 192 boys, 8.3 percent, already had some type of law enforcement contact. The typical complaint against these 16 boys was for malicious destruction of property, although this legal charge was not, of course, necessarily indicative of the nature of their violational behavior. Several of these 16 nominees were on file for more than one previous offense. In 13 of the 16 cases, one or more members of the family besides the boy himself also had experienced contact with the court. Members of 42 other families also had court contact although usually of a domestic relations variety. In these instances the nominee was not di-

<sup>5</sup> JAMES E. MORLOCK, *Predicting Delinquency in a Homogeneous Group of Pre-Adolescent Boys*, Doctoral Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1947.

<sup>6</sup> SHELDON AND ELEANOR GLUECK, *UNRAVELING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY*, New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1950.

TABLE I  
NUMBER OF CLASSIFIED REASONS FOR NON-DELINQUENCY OF NOMINEES BY  
INDIVIDUAL SIXTH GRADE TEACHERS

| Individual Teachers (by code number) | Home Factors | Personal Characteristics | Character Building Organizations & Companions | Negative Factors | Total  | Number of Nominees |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|---|------------------|--------|--------------------|
| 1                                    | 16           | 11                       | 3   | 1                | 31     | 6                  |
| 2                                    | 0            | 9                        | 1   | 4                | 14     | 6                  |
| 3                                    | 12           | 15                       | 1   | 4                | 32     | 7                  |
| 4                                    | 17           | 33                       | 10  | 8                | 68     | 13                 |
| 5                                    | 11           | 17                       | 7   | 1                | 36     | 6                  |
| 6                                    | 11           | 12                       | 12  | 2                | 37     | 6                  |
| 7                                    | 7            | 5                        | 9   | 4                | 25     | 5                  |
| 8                                    | 6            | 10                       | 3   | 0                | 19     | 4                  |
| 9                                    | 4            | 9                        | 7   | 1                | 21     | 3                  |
| 10                                   | 3            | 31                       | 7   | 2                | 43     | 9                  |
| 11                                   | 15           | 42                       | 16  | 9                | 82     | 15                 |
| 12                                   | 1            | 14                       | 6   | 3                | 24     | 7                  |
| 13                                   | 10           | 4                        | 2   | 4                | 20     | 7                  |
| 14                                   | 7            | 6                        | 3   | 1                | 17     | 2                  |
| 15                                   | 28           | 16                       | 12  | 5                | 61     | 7                  |
| 16                                   | 10           | 20                       | 6   | 4                | 40     | 7                  |
| 17                                   | 6            | 9                        | 3   | 3                | 21     | 5                  |
| 18                                   | 4            | 16                       | 9   | 4                | 33     | 5                  |
| 19                                   | 1            | 9                        | 1   | 4                | 15     | 3                  |
| 20                                   | 7            | 17                       | 12  | 2                | 38     | 7                  |
| 21                                   | 5            | 9                        | 2   | 0                | 16     | 2                  |
| 22                                   | 26           | 1                        | 2   | 0                | 29     | 7                  |
| 23                                   | 7            | 8                        | 3   | 0                | 18     | 4                  |
| 24                                   | 18           | 13                       | 2   | 1                | 34     | 9                  |
| 25                                   | 0            | 12                       | 2   | 0                | 14     | 3                  |
| 26                                   | 6            | 20                       | 6   | 3                | 35     | 5                  |
| 27                                   | 15           | 17                       | 10  | 2                | 44     | 10                 |
| 28                                   | 9            | 19                       | 13  | 3                | 44     | 5                  |
| 29                                   | 1            | 8                        | 10  | 0                | 19     | 9                  |
| 30                                   | 17           | 54                       | 20  | 5                | 96     | 8                  |
| Total.....                           | 280          | 464                      | 200   | 72               | 1,033* | 192                |

\* Total includes unclassifiable items.

rectly involved. In all, one or more members of over 28 percent of the 192 families had some court experience.

As a result, the 16 boys with police or court contact were eliminated from consideration as "insulated" against delinquency. A series of neighborhood visits failed to locate 51 others. In the remaining 125 cases both the boy and his mother cooperated in the study.

An analysis of the scores made by these 125 boys on the delinquency and social responsibility scales of the Gough California Personality Inventory, seemed to justify their selection as "good" boys. Out of a possible total score of 54 on the modified delinquency scale, scores ranged from a low of four to a high of thirty-four. The

mean De score was 14.57 and the standard deviation 6.42. This mean delinquency score was significantly lower than that of school behavior problem boys, young delinquents or reformatory inmates investigated in other studies. In fact, the average score of the 125 boys was lower than that obtained in almost all previously published studies using the same scale.<sup>7</sup> Only five of the nominees had scores approaching the high delinquency proneness range.

Conversely, the nominees scored high on the social responsibility scale. The mean Re score for the group was 28.86 with a standard deviation of 3.60 and a range of 12 to 40 out of a possible 42 points. The Pearsonian correlation between the two scales was  $-0.605$  indicating a significant and negative relationship between delinquency vulnerability and social responsibility as measured by these instruments.

These inventory instruments, the teacher nominations and police and juvenile court clearances, whether considered independently or jointly, pointed to the apparent "insulation" against delinquent patterns of these 125 boys. The basic questions as to why these boys were "insulated" and the process through which this was achieved remain to be explored.

Unfortunately the analysis of the data is not far enough along to permit more than some cursory comments on these basic problems. After an examination of the background characteristics of the 125 families, the available data will be presented in terms of family integration and stability, affectional relationships in the family, the boy's attitudes and conceptions of self and the nature of his interpersonal relationships outside the home.

#### BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

A general appraisal of the social background characteristics of the families represented in this study indicated little to distinguish them from other families in the same areas of residence. Well over three-fourths of the male wage-earners were working as craftsmen and operatives, over 73 percent of the families were renters and two-thirds of the families had maintained their present address for five years or more. Over 78 percent of the families were intact or non-broken and the remainder were broken predominately by divorce and separation. In over half the broken families, a step-parent had replaced the biological parent and in the rest the boy lived with grandparents or other relatives.

These 125 families had an average of 3.6 children. The boy in question was the oldest child in one-fourth of the families and the youngest in the same percentage of families. In 14 percent of the families he was the only child and in the remainder his ordinal position ranged from second to eleventh. In general, there appeared to be no particularly favorable or adverse selection of either the boys or the families on these characteristics.

#### FAMILY INTEGRATION AND STABILITY

Whether assessed as a whole or by individual items, the evaluations of the teachers, mothers and boys tended to indicate that there existed a great deal of solidarity and cohesiveness in the family situations of the "insulated" boys. On a general level the

<sup>7</sup> HARRISON G. GOUGH, *Systematic Validation of a Test for Delinquency*, op. cit. p. 3.

125 families, whether intact or broken and reestablished, appeared to be relatively stable maritally, residentially and economically. More importantly, perhaps, although the boys and their mothers varied considerably in their appraisals of the degree of family cohesiveness and harmony, both sets of respondents tended to evaluate their families very favorably. Only three boys indicated that their families "were not so good". The rest thought them equal or superior to any.

On the whole, there appeared to be close parental supervision of the boys' activities and associates, an intense parental interest in the welfare of the children and a desire to inculcate them with non-deviant attitudes and behavior patterns. Participation in social and recreational activities more often than not occurred on a family basis and there appeared to be a minimum of bickering and conflict in the home.

The outstanding characteristic of these family profiles was undoubtedly the great parental interest in the boys and the degree of supervision given them. Almost without exception the mothers indicated that they knew the boys' friends, that these friends were good boys and that, in fact, the boys couldn't have selected better friends. The mothers further indicated that they knew the whereabouts of their sons at almost all times and many stated that they insisted on this knowledge. This type of supervision extended to other activities as well. Nearly 80 percent of the boys had well defined duties to perform at home and half this number held remunerative after school employment which most often consisted of a paper route. Movie attendance was also controlled. Over 76 percent of the boys attended movies no more than once a week on the average and only one boy as often as three times weekly.

Most of the mothers, some 70 percent, indicated that their families were able to participate as a family group in many leisure activities. For the rest, the lack of such participation was ascribed to the father's job demands or a new baby in the home. Conversely, according to the mothers at least, the homes were peaceful and harmonious if not exactly models of tranquility. Only one mother stated that there was a great deal of fighting at home and eight others that some fighting did on occasion occur. The boys were somewhat less impressed with the degree of familial harmony. Over 55 percent of the nominees believed their homes were characterized by some or a great deal of parental bickering.

#### FAMILY AFFECTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The degree and quality of parental affection, discipline, and attention as well as the amount and kind of punishment used by parents have been posited as exerting a profound influence on delinquency proneness.<sup>8</sup> The profile data regarding these variables obtained in this investigation serve to raise some very disconcerting issues concerning the validity of this assertion. It is interesting to note that these "insulated" boys and their mothers could not agree on the nature and quality of these affectional relationships. Predictive tables based on the mothers' conceptions of these relationships would consequently be quite different in character from those based on the boys' conceptions.

Specifically, the mothers stated that their sons were and had been relatively easy

<sup>8</sup> For example, the research of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *op. cit.*, might be considered representative of this point of view.

to manage and that they enjoy warm affectional relationships with them but that the boys received only little or no attention and affection from their fathers. Nearly three-fourths of the mothers indicated that their sons rarely if ever confided in their fathers. The fathers were portrayed as being somewhat aloof in their affectional relationships with the boys; it was the mother alone who largely fulfilled the emotional requirements of their children.

If parental differences did exist in interpersonal relationships with the nominees, the boys themselves were hardly cognizant of them. For example, 56 percent of the boys indicated that they received a great deal of attention from their mothers, while 45 percent said they received such attention from their fathers. On the other extreme, only two and four boys respectively felt a lack of attention from their mothers and fathers. Similarly, 14 percent of the boys believed that their mothers were overly restrictive and 13 percent that they were too lax in their discipline. This compares with 20 and 11 percent of the boys who thought that discipline by their fathers was either too harsh or too lax. In general, then, the large majority of the boys appeared to be satisfied with the amount of attention and type of discipline given them.

As for punishment, all but two of the mothers felt that their sons were never punished excessively, nor indeed that there was, as a rule, any great need for the infliction of punishment. On the other hand, four boys stated that they were often punished without cause and 41 percent indicated that this sometimes occurred.

#### NOMINEE ATTITUDES AND CONCEPTIONS OF SELF

The 125 boys were described by their mothers as quiet (64 percent) or as average (22 percent) boys. The nominees, however, did not conceive of themselves in this way. Only 15 percent thought of themselves as being quiet, 19 percent as very active and the rest as average in this respect. Similarly, most of the boys indicated that they had an average amount of ability and were about as good as most other boys.

With regard to conception of self as deviant or non-deviant, 70 percent of the boys seemed certain that they would never be brought before the juvenile court; only one boy believed that he would have future contact with the court. Two-thirds indicated certainty about never being taken to jail. In addition, 57 percent did not rule out the possibility of becoming policemen.

Of special interest to sociologists is the finding that although residing in highly delinquent areas, only a handful of these "insulated" boys had any delinquent companions. Most of the friends of 88 percent of the nominees had never been in trouble with the law. In only 12 percent of the cases had the friends of these boys experienced any contact. Thus, the boys' companions were either completely or almost completely free of police and court contact.

These data lend themselves to a certain amount of intriguing speculation. To what extent is this apparent isolation from deviant companions and norms a function of something in the boy and to what degree is it something largely external to him? Further, why these great differences in perception of patterns of family interaction between the boys and their mothers? How can perceptions vary so widely yet result in a generally favorable appraisal of family life on the part of almost all respondents?

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This pilot study, embodying a unique approach to the study of delinquency, has attempted through interviews with teachers, mothers and boys and through delinquency proneness and other scales to develop profiles of "insulated" boys in high delinquency areas. The results of this preliminary effort are very encouraging. They portray the "insulated" boy as one who is thought by his teacher, parents, and others to be a good boy, and who conceives of himself as a conventional and law-abiding individual. He has for the most part been relatively "isolated" from the pervasive delinquent patterns characteristic of his area of residence. This relative isolation from deviant norms and associations may be attributed in part to close maternal supervision in a relatively non-deviant, harmonious and stable family setting. In this setting, the boy's affectional needs appeared to be satisfactorily met in terms of his own perceptions of these needs. Finally, the social processing of these boys was essentially characterized by an unusually firm presentation of non-deviant values to the exclusion of others. Little evidence of value conflict on the part of the boys was found.

Still unanswered by this preliminary report are some very vital questions on which it is hoped more can be said when these and other data have been more completely analyzed. For example, are these "insulated" boys representative of non-delinquents generally or are they merely as idiosyncratic a group on the one hand as are delinquent samples on the other? Have sociologists tended to overemphasize the lack of cohesiveness in lower class family life or are these families merely exceptional cases in this regard? Finally, would similar studies of "insulated" white as well as Negro boys in other and even more highly disorganized areas reveal comparable degrees of maternal supervision, satisfactory interpersonal relationships and isolation from non-deviant norms?