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A SELF GRADIENT AMONG POTENTIAL DELINQUENTS*

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EDITOR.

This paper presents an analysis of 101 twelve year old white boys in the highest delinquency areas in Columbus, Ohio, who were nominated by their sixth-grade room teachers as headed for police and juvenile court contact. In this sense they were conceived of as being potentially delinquent boys. In a previous paper this entire group of potentially delinquent boys was compared with 125 potentially insulated boys who were nominated by teachers in the same schools in the same high delinquency areas as youngsters who would not come into contact with the police or juvenile court.⁶

The major findings in this comparative study indicated that the potentially insulated boys consistently defined themselves as accepting legal and social norms in their home and school life and in their friendship patterns and leisure activities and that they conceived of themselves as "good" boys. The potentially delinquent nominees, on the other hand, were more negative in their appraisals of self and in the perceptions of their relationships. Many anticipated being involved in violational behavior and most of them associated with friends who had a record of previous misconduct. They also less favorably evaluated their relationships at home and in school. The authors therefore proposed that appropriate or inappropriate concepts of self and others constituted the component which steered boys in adverse neighborhood environments away from or towards delinquency.^{1, 5, 7}

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¹ CROFT, IVOR J. AND TADEUSZ GRYGIER, "Social Relationships of Truants and Juvenile Delinquents", *HUMAN RELATIONS*, 9 (December, 1956), pp. 439-463.

The purpose of the present paper is, if possible, to further validate the above findings. If potentially good boys in high delinquency areas have socially acceptable or appropriate concepts of self and others and if these are concurred in by their mothers and teachers, and if potentially delinquent boys had adverse concepts of self and others which are equally concurred in by their mothers and teachers, then it would seem logical that the already delinquent white boys among those nominated as potentially delinquent should show even more delinquency vulnerability and an even greater tendency towards having an adverse concept of self. Likewise, high scorers on a delinquency proneness test should show a greater tendency to have adverse concepts of self than low scorers. Furthermore, from the point of view of self-theory we would expect that the mothers of the high

² ELY, JOHN S., *An Ecological Study of Juvenile Delinquency in Franklin County*, Master's Thesis, Ohio State University, 1952.

³ GOUGH, HARRISON G., "Systematic Validation of a Test for Delinquency", reprint of a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, September, 1954.

⁴ GOUGH, HARRISON G. AND DONALD R. PETERSON, "The Identification and Measurement of Predispositional Factors in Crime and Delinquency", *JOUR OF CONSULT PSYCHOL*, 16 (June, 1952), pp. 207-212.

⁵ McCANN, RICHARD C., "The Self Image and Delinquency: Some Implications for Religion", *FEDERAL PROBATION*, 20 (September, 1956), pp. 14-23.

⁶ RECKLESS, WALTER C., SIMON DINITZ AND BARBARA KAY, "The Self Component in Potential Delinquency and Non-Delinquency", *AMER. SOCIOL REV.*, 22 (October, 1957), 566-570.

⁷ RECKLESS, WALTER C., SIMON DINITZ AND BARBARA KAY, "Self Concept as an Insulator Against Delinquency", *AMER. SOCIOL REV.*, 21 (December, 1956), pp. 744-746.

scorers should agree with their sons' perceptions of intra-family relationships no less often than the mothers of the low scorers should agree with their sons' perceptions of intra-family relationships. This paper will present data bearing on these propositions. Before doing so, however, certain general findings on our potentially delinquent nominees will be discussed.

Thirty-seven sixth-grade teachers in twenty schools located in the highest areas of white delinquency in Columbus, Ohio, selected 108 boys as being potentially delinquent.² These boys constituted one-fourth of the eligible students. The average class contained 11.7 white boys and 2.9 boys per class were nominated. While nine teachers failed to nominate a single student, the nominations in a few classrooms ran as high as 60 percent of the eligible boys.

A check of police and juvenile court files revealed that twenty-five of these twelve year old boys, 23 percent, were already on record for previous offenses which ranged from charges of incorrigibility to theft. (An awareness of some of their students' previous police and court contacts undoubtedly influenced the teachers in their nominations.)

Of 108 boys nominated as being potentially delinquent the 101 who were eventually contacted scored high on the delinquency vulnerability and correspondingly low on the social responsibility scales of the California Psychological Inventory.^{3, 4} Their mean delinquency vulnerability (DE) scale score was 22.60 and their mean social responsibility (RE) score was 24.26. These mean scores were significantly higher on the DE and lower on the RE scales than those made by the "good" boys of the first study. Indeed, this mean delinquency

vulnerability score was higher than that achieved by any of the non-delinquent and non-disciplinary sample subjects tested in other studies. Similarly, the mean social responsibility score was lower than those recorded in other studies for all but prisoners, delinquents and school disciplinary cases. These scores appeared to validate the judgments of the teachers in selecting these boys as ones who would get into future difficulties with the law.

Not only did these scales appear to differentiate between the potentially delinquent and non-delinquent but even more importantly they were found to discriminate with the sample of nominated delinquents between those boys who had and those who had not experienced previous court contact. The 24 boys who were on file for offenses had a mean score of 25.58 on the DE and 21.50 on the RE scales. The 77 who were free of contact scored 21.68 on the DE and 25.12 on the RE scales. These differences between the contact and no contact groups on both scales were statistically significant. (These data are presented in Table I.)

COMPARISON OF THE DELINQUENT WITH THE NON-DELINQUENT BUT PRONE NOMINEES

Evidence obtained in this investigation concerns the results of a comparison of 24 boys who had previously experienced police or court contact and the 77 who had not yet been involved in reported violations of law. The former, it will be recalled, had been found to score significantly higher on the delinquency vulnerability scale and significantly lower on the social responsibility instruments than the non-contact cases. Two-thirds of those with previous court contact had

TABLE I
MEAN DELINQUENCY VULNERABILITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY SCORES OF "INSULATED", POTENTIALLY DELINQUENT AND COURT CONTACT SAMPLE RESPONDENTS

Scales and Samples	N	Mean Score	S.D.	C.R.	P
Delinquency Vulnerability Scale	125				
"Insulated" cases	125	14.57	6.42	8.19	.001
Potential Delinquents	101	22.60	7.99		
No Court Contact	77	21.68	7.24	2.14	.03
Court Contact	24	25.58	9.40		
Social Responsibility Scale					
"Insulated" cases	125	28.86	3.60	7.86	.001
Potential Delinquents	101	24.26	4.91		
No Court Contact	77	25.12	4.07	3.32	.001
Court Contact	24	21.50	4.82		

been among the high delinquency vulnerability subjects, using the mean score as the breaking point.

Although all of the twelve year old subjects had been nominated as almost certain prospects for future legal action, the findings indicated that those who had already been in trouble with the law defined themselves significantly more often than the others as likely candidates for getting into future difficulties with the police and courts. For example, two-thirds of the contact cases stated that they expected to be taken to juvenile court at some time in the future as against only 10 percent of the non-contact boys. This difference was also reflected by the mothers of both sets of respondents. Nearly 30 percent of the mothers of the contact cases did not expect their sons to stay out of trouble. This compares with eight percent of the mothers of the non-contact subjects who felt that their sons would not avoid future difficulties. Similarly, significantly more of the contact cases expected to be taken to jail.

In addition, a significantly greater proportion of the contact cases frequently neglected to inform their parents of their whereabouts and activities, more frequently relied on their friends, rather than on their parents for advice, had older friends and thought that they would neither stay out of trouble nor complete high school.

While neither group of respondents defined their family affectional relationships as being highly satisfactory, and undoubtedly because of this, no significant differences were found between them on these items. The contact and non-contact subjects did not differ in their evaluations of family affectional patterns, discipline, attachment, attention or interest.

From these results it is apparent that the contact cases in many respects seem to be confirmed in their delinquent self concepts to a greater extent than are the others. Whether this is a cause or effect of their previous experience with the persons and machinery surrounding the legal processes cannot be determined. Neither can the evaluations of their mothers and teachers be said to be the cause or result of the boys' greater expectations for delinquency in the future.

HIGH AND LOW SCORERS AMONG THE DELINQUENCY PRONE BOYS

Additional data obtained in this research also tends to support the thesis that delinquency

proneness is associated with self concept and with differential evaluations of interpersonal relations. The 48 high and 53 low scorers on the delinquency vulnerability scale appeared to differ significantly in some of their self-concepts, friendship patterns, relations with parents and self-appraisals with regard to the probability of becoming involved in future legal and social forms of delinquency. For example, significantly fewer of the low scorers thought they would ever incur juvenile court action or detention or ever be taken to jail.

In general, significantly more of the low scorers indicated that they were stricter about right and wrong than most people and predicted that they would stay out of trouble. It is equally significant to indicate that more of the low scorers sought to keep out of trouble at all costs and fewer had friends who were older or who had been in trouble with the law. Significantly more of the low scorers abided by their parents wishes, preferred the advice of their parents to that of their friends, and kept their parents informed about their activities and friends. More of the low scorers held positive attitudes towards school. They indicated that there was very little parental and sibling conflict at home, that the family members were close to one another, and that they were receiving more attention from their mothers than most boys.

These findings are especially significant for two reasons. First, all of the boys, both low and high scorers, were nominated as being potentially delinquent. Despite this built-in homogeneity, differences in self concept and interpersonal evaluations were found. Second, the low and high scorers as a group were found to differ significantly on most of these same and other variables from the group of "insulated" good boys who had been nominated and studied in the same way. These results would consequently seem to give further confirmation to the thesis that an appropriate or inappropriate self concept is an important component of non-delinquency and delinquency.

AGREEMENT WITH MOTHERS' EVALUATIONS

The mothers of the high and low scorers also differed in many of their concepts of their sons and of intra-family relationships. Thus, the mothers of the low scorers more frequently indicated that they knew their sons' friends and were interested in their activities. They also indicated that there was very little conflict in the home and that they were very attentive to their sons. In

other respects, such as discipline, affection, parental strictness or laxity and the like there were no differences between the two groups of parents.

If, as has been held by the interactional theorists, self concept is a reflection of the definitions of one's self held by others, then the high scorers and their parents would be expected to agree as frequently in their evaluations of each other and their relationships as would the low scorers and their parents. Analysis of the data revealed that such was indeed the case. The parents of the high scorers agreed with the more negative definitions of their sons as consistently as did the parents of the low scorers with their sons' more positive images. The areas of agreement for both groups included the boy's ability to avoid future difficulties with the law, his friends and activities and whether these were desirable, his relationships with his parents, his general activity level and even whether he will finish high school.

SUMMARY

As an extension of a previous investigation of "insulated" boys in high delinquency areas, the same sixth-grade teachers in the same schools in the same high delinquency areas in Columbus, Ohio nominated one-fourth of their eligible white students as being almost certain to experience future police and juvenile court contact. Investigation revealed that some 23 percent of these twelve year old boys had already experienced such contact.

These 101 nominated subjects were found to score significantly higher on the delinquency vulnerability scale and significantly lower on the social responsibility scale of the Gough California Psychological Inventory than 125 "insulated" boys tested previously. The 24 previous contact cases as compared with the 77 non-contact cases were also found to score significantly higher on the delinquency vulnerability scale and lower on the social responsibility scale. The previous contact cases indicated that they expected to get into future difficulties with the law much more frequently than the non-contact but delinquency prone nominees and these differential expectations also were reflected by the mothers of both sets of respondents.

Within the sample of nominated delinquents those boys who had high scores on the delinquency vulnerability scale were found to differ significantly in the direction of delinquency from the low scorers in some of their concepts of self and others, friendship patterns and relations with parents and in the evaluations of their chances of becoming involved in future difficulties with the law. The mothers of the high scorers were found to agree no less often with their sons' more negative self and social definitions than the mothers of the low scorers did in their sons' somewhat more positive orientations and evaluations.

These results seemed to lend further support to the thesis that an appropriate or inappropriate concept of self is an important component in non-delinquency and delinquency.