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# EXTENT OF UNRECORDED JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

## TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS<sup>1</sup>

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This is one of a series of articles by the authors dealing with delinquent behavior among non-institutionalized adolescents—EDITOR.

The frequency and nature of delinquent behavior committed by adolescents never arrested or committed to institutions has been regarded by criminologists as an important but unknown dimension of delinquent behavior. The informed layman also is aware that only a portion of delinquent behavior is followed by arrest and conviction; further, that conviction and committal to a "training school" is much more likely to follow delinquent behavior if the adolescent is from the "wrong side of the tracks." The picture of delinquent behavior obtained from official records only, and particularly the punitive action of the courts, is known to be incomplete and seriously biased.

That concern with unrecorded delinquency is high is indicated by the great interest shown in the pioneer studies of Robison,<sup>2</sup> Schwartz,<sup>3</sup> Porterfield,<sup>4</sup> and the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study,<sup>5</sup> in texts and in recent papers by the writers.<sup>6</sup> Cohen has called for an extension of such studies,<sup>7</sup> and a

<sup>1</sup> From two larger studies of adolescent delinquency and adjustment supported in part by grants from the Social Science Research Council and the College Committee on Research of the State College of Washington.

<sup>2</sup> SOPHIA ROBISON, *CAN DELINQUENCY BE MEASURED* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

<sup>3</sup> EDWARD E. SCHWARTZ, *A Community Experiment in the Measurement of Juvenile Delinquency*, reprinted from NAT. PROB. ASSOC. YEARBOOK, 1945 (Washington: U.S.G.P.O., 1947).

<sup>4</sup> AUSTIN L. PORTERFIELD, *YOUTH IN TROUBLE* (Forth Worth: Leo Potishman Foundation, 1946) Chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup> FRED J. MURPHY, MARY M. SHIRLEY, AND HELEN L. WITNER, "The Incidence of Hidden Delinquency," *AM. JOUR. OF ORTHOPSYCHIATRY*, 16 (October, 1946), 686-696.

<sup>6</sup> ALBERT K. COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS: THE CULTURE OF THE GANG* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955), 37-41; For the authors' statement as to the importance of such data, see JAMES F. SHORT, JR. AND F. IVAN NYE, *Reported Behavior as a Criterion of Deviant Behavior*, *Soc. Problems*, Winter, 1957-1958.

<sup>7</sup> ALBERT K. COHEN, *Sociological Research in Juvenile Delinquency*, paper read before American Orthopsychiatric Association, March, 1956.

number of other investigators are pursuing research projects dealing with unrecorded delinquency.<sup>8</sup>

The methodology of the investigations which form the basis for this paper have been described elsewhere and will not be repeated here.<sup>9</sup> The present paper deals with (1) types and frequency of delinquent behavior as indicated by 23 specific delinquent acts ranging from driving without a license to grand larceny and drug use, and by the use of delinquency scales derived from these items; (2) comparison of delinquent behavior in western and mid-western high school students; and (3) comparison of unrecorded delinquency with official records of delinquency.

The data were gathered by anonymous questionnaire in the classroom under the supervision of the writers. A 75 percent sample was taken from the three western high schools (cities of 10,000 to 30,000 population) and a 100 percent sample in three smaller mid-western communities. Approximately 99 percent of the questionnaires were usable.<sup>10</sup> In addition to being considered generally suitable for present research purposes, these particular communities possessed the positive advantage that active and informed lay people were ready to sponsor the project and interpret it to the community.

<sup>8</sup> The authors are aware of studies under way in Chicago, Kansas City, Indiana, Tennessee, Columbus, Ohio, New York City, and in the State of Washington.

<sup>9</sup> F. IVAN NYE AND JAMES F. SHORT, JR., *Scaling Delinquent Behavior*, *AMER. SOCIOLOGICAL REV.*, 22 (June, 1957); F. IVAN NYE, *Family Relationships and Delinquent Behavior*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958, Chapter I. JAMES F. SHORT, JR., *The Study of Juvenile Delinquency by Reported Behavior—An Experiment in Method and Preliminary Findings*, paper read at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Society, Washington, D. C., 1955 (dittoed).

<sup>10</sup> Questionnaires were administered by one or both writers, assisted by other staff members or graduate students of the Department of Sociology of the State College of Washington. For further methodological details, see references cited in footnote 9.

TABLE I  
REPORTED DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR AMONG BOYS IN THREE SAMPLES

Type of Offense	Percent Admitting Commission of Offense			Percent Admitting Commission of Offense More than Once or Twice		
	M.W.	West	Tr.S.	M.W.	West	Tr.S.
Driven a car without a driver's license or permit	81.1	75.3	91.1	61.2	49.0	73.4
Skipped School	54.4	53.0	95.3	24.4	23.8	85.9
Had fist fight with one person	86.7	80.7	95.3	32.6	31.9	75.0
"Run away" from home	12.9	13.0	68.1	2.8	2.4	37.7
School probation or expulsion	15.3	11.3	67.8	2.1	2.9	31.3
Defied parents' authority	22.2	33.1	52.4	1.4	6.3	23.6
Driven too fast or recklessly	49.7	46.0	76.3	22.7	19.1	51.6
Taken little things (worth less than \$2) that did not belong to you	62.7	60.6	91.8	18.5	12.9	65.1
Taken things of medium value (\$2-\$50)	17.1	15.8	91.0	3.8	3.8	61.4
Taken things of large value (\$50)	3.5	5.0	90.8	1.1	2.1	47.7
Used force (strong-arm methods) to get money from another person	6.3	—	67.7	2.4	—	35.5
Taken part in "gang fights"	24.3	22.5	67.4	6.7	5.2	47.4
Taken a car for a ride without the owner's knowledge	11.2	14.8	75.2	4.5	4.0	53.4
Bought or drank beer, wine, or liquor (include drinking at home)	67.7	57.2	89.7	35.8	29.5	79.4
Bought or drank beer, wine, or liquor (outside your home)	43.0	—	87.0	21.1	—	75.0
Drank beer, wine, or liquor in your own home	57.0	—	62.8	24.1	—	31.9
Deliberate property damage	60.7	44.8	84.3	17.5	8.2	49.7
Used or sold narcotic drugs	1.4	2.2	23.1	0.7	1.6	12.6
Had sex relations with another person of the same sex (not masturbation)	12.0	8.8	10.9	3.9	2.9	3.1
Had sex relations with a person of the opposite sex	38.8	40.4	87.5	20.3	19.9	73.4
Gone hunting or fishing without a license (or violated other game laws)	74.0	62.7	66.7	39.6	23.5	44.8
Taken things you didn't want	15.7	22.5	56.8	1.4	3.1	26.8
"Beat up" on kids who hadn't done anything to you	15.7	13.9	48.7	3.1	2.8	26.2
Hurt someone to see them squirm	22.7	15.8	33.4	2.8	3.2	17.5

The measures of delinquent behavior used in this paper are based upon a list of behavior items commonly referred to in the laws relating to delinquent and criminal behavior. Delinquency has been defined in descriptive terms rather than in terms of legalistic categories. For example, we refer to stealing things of a certain value, rather than to descriptions of property offenses, e.g., robbery, burglary, larceny, etc.

#### HIGH SCHOOL POPULATIONS

Because they seem likely to be more representative of the general population than are college or training school populations, we have concentrated our research on high school populations. Table I presents the percentage of boys in our two high school samples, western and mid-western, and in the

western training school group, who report committing each of 21 delinquency items, and the percentage who admit committing these offenses more than once or twice. Table II presents these data for the high school and training school girls.

From these tables it is apparent that the types of delinquent behavior studied are extensive and variable in the populations studies. We have compared students in the western and mid-western samples in order to secure an estimate of the stability of responses in two non-institutionalized populations. Populations in these two regional samples differ in such respects as city size and population mobility. The mid-western sample is comprised of three small communities: a suburb of a large city, a rural town, and a consolidated rural school district. The western sample comprises three small

TABLE II  
REPORTED DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR AMONG GIRLS IN THREE SAMPLES

Type of Offense	Percent Admitting Commission of Offense			Percent Admitting Commission of Offense More than Once or Twice		
	M.W.	West	Tr.S.	M.W.	West	Tr.S.
Driven a car without a driver's license or permit	60.1	58.2	68.3	33.6	29.9	54.4
Skipped School	40.3	41.0	94.0	10.1	12.2	66.3
Had fist fight with one person	32.7	28.2	72.3	7.4	5.7	44.6
"Run away" from home	9.8	11.3	85.5	1.0	1.0	51.8
School probation or expulsion	2.7	3.7	63.4	0.3	0.2	29.3
Defied parents' authority	33.0	30.6	68.3	3.7	5.0	39.0
Driven too fast or recklessly	20.9	16.3	47.5	5.7	5.4	35.0
Taken little things (worth less than \$2) that did not belong to you	36.0	30.0	77.8	5.7	3.5	48.1
Taken things of medium value (\$2-50)	3.4	3.9	58.0	1.0	0.6	29.6
Taken things of large value (\$50)	2.0	1.3	30.4	1.7	0.9	10.1
Used force (strong-arm methods) to get money from another person	1.3	—	36.7	0.3	—	21.5
Taken part in "gang fights"	9.7	6.5	59.0	1.7	1.1	27.7
Taken a car for a ride without the owner's knowledge	5.4	4.5	36.6	1.0	0.6	20.7
Bought or drank beer, wine, or liquor (include drinking at home)	62.7	44.5	90.2	23.1	17.6	80.5
Bought or drank beer, wine, or liquor (outside your home)	28.7	—	83.9	10.8	—	75.3
Drank beer, wine, or liquor in your own home	54.2	—	71.1	16.4	—	42.2
Deliberate property damage	21.7	13.6	65.4	5.7	1.6	32.1
Used or sold narcotic drugs	1.3	0.5	36.9	0.3	0.3	23.8
Had sex relations with another person of the same sex (not masturbation)	5.4	3.6	25.0	1.7	0.5	12.5
Had sex relations with a person of the opposite sex	12.5	14.1	95.1	4.1	4.8	81.5
Gone hunting or fishing without a license (or violated other game laws)	20.6	20.3	27.5	5.7	3.9	21.3
Taken things you didn't want	6.4	3.6	43.0	0.7	0.6	13.9
"Beat up" on kids who hadn't done anything to you	5.7	3.1	37.8	1.0	0.9	18.3
Hurt someone to see them squirm	10.4	9.3	35.4	1.0	1.1	20.7

contiguous cities. The population of the mid-western communities has been fairly stable since 1940, in contrast to the rapid population growth experienced by the western cities. These samples are alike in important respects, however. Ethnic composition is similar, both populations being overwhelmingly native caucasian, and age and sex are controlled. Perhaps of greater importance, both populations are non-institutionalized.

Few statistically significant differences between our two non-institutionalized groups are found in Tables I and II.<sup>11</sup> This may be taken as an indica-

tion of stability and reliability of the responses obtained from the two samples. Comparison of sixteen and seventeen year old high school boys on a seven-item delinquency scale, based upon these same data, indicates agreement between the two

Nine of 21 possible comparisons of the percentage of western and mid-western boys who admit committing these offenses are significant at least at the .05 level. Eight of these 9 offenses are committed by a higher percentage of mid-western boys. When percentage of boys admitting commission of these offenses more than once or twice is compared, only 6 significant differences (at .05 level) are found, 5 of these being higher for the mid-western boys. When mid-western and western girls are compared as to commission of these offenses, 5 significant differences are found, all being committed by a higher percentage of mid-western girls. Only 1 significant difference between these groups of non-institutionalized girls is found when percentages admitting commission of the 21 offenses more than once or twice is compared.

<sup>11</sup> Samples from both finite and hypothetical universes are treated. The Western state samples represent 25 per cent regular-interval samples of the high school population. Mid-western and training school samples represent 100 per cent samples of the individuals in those selected grades in the Mid-western high schools and 100 per cent samples of the training schools.

groups of boys in 90.7 percent of the scale responses.<sup>12</sup> We note that such differences as are found in Tables I and II indicate that delinquent behavior is somewhat more widespread in the smaller, older, more structured mid-western sample than in the larger, newer, growing western communities.

The most common offenses reported "more than once or twice" by high school boys and girls in Tables I and II are traffic offenses, truancy, and drinking. Boys also report considerable fighting, stealing (of small things), heterosexual relations, and game violations.

Comparisons of western institutionalized and non-institutionalized boys and girls on the delinquency items in Tables I and II indicates that significantly higher proportions of the "official" delinquents commit virtually all of the offenses, and commit them more often, than do the high school students.<sup>13</sup> Exceptions to this pattern are found only in the case of homosexual relations among the boys, driving a car without a license among girls, and game violations among both boys and girls. In spite of the statistical significance of these comparisons, however, it is apparent that there is a good deal of "overlapping" between institutionalized and non-institutionalized boys and girls in the frequency of commission of our delinquency items.

In order to specify more precisely the amount of such overlapping, indexes of delinquent behavior in the form of Guttman-type scales have been constructed. Scales for 16 and 17 year old boys, consisting of seven and eleven delinquency items, have been described elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> These scales proved to be nearly equal in their ability to differentiate be-

<sup>12</sup> These data are described and graphically presented in F. IVAN NYE AND JAMES F. SHORT, JR., *Scaling Delinquent Behavior*, AMER. SOCIOLOGICAL REV., *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> This conclusion is based upon statistical comparison of figures presented in Tables 1 and 2, for our institutionalized and non-institutionalized western state boys and girls.

<sup>14</sup> F. IVAN NYE AND JAMES F. SHORT, JR., *op. cit.* The seven-item scale included the following delinquency items: driving a car without a license or permit, taking little things (worth less than \$2) that did not belong to you, buying or drinking beer, wine, or liquor (include drinking at home), skipping school without a legitimate excuse, purposely damaging or destroying public or private property, sex relations with a person of the opposite sex, and defying parents' authority to their faces. Offenses added for the eleven-item scale were: taking things of medium value, taking things of large value, running away from home, and narcotics violations. These data were rescored following the Israel "Gamma" technique in order to remove "idiosyncratic" elements, prior to scaling. For the procedure, and an exposition of its rationale, see M. W. RILEY,

TABLE III

DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR SCORES OF HIGH SCHOOL AND TRAINING SCHOOL BOYS AGED 16 AND 17\*

Scale Type	Delinquent Behavior score	High School		Training School	
		Fre-quency	Cumula-tive Percent	Fre-quency	Cumula-tive Percent
1	00	0	0	0	0
2	01	128	22	0	0
3	02	40	29	0	0
4	03	60	40	0	0
5	04	105	58	3	2
6	05	28	63	2	4
7	06	26	68	3	6
8	07	25	72	2	8
9	08	80	86	7	14
10	09	31	92	24	32
11	10	27	96	8	39
12	11	6	97	11	48
13	12	6	98	15	60
14	13	5	99	16	72
15	14	3	100	34	100
		—	—	—	—
		570		125	

\* No scores were obtained for one training school and eight high school boys.

tween institutionalized and non-institutionalized boys. On the seven-item scale, a cutting point is found which maximizes the difference in delinquency involvement between the two groups of boys at 71 percent (See Table III). At this cutting point, 86 percent of the non-institutionalized boys had been accounted for, as compared with only 14 percent of the training school boys. This difference on the eleven-item scale was maximized at 67 percent.<sup>15</sup> The amount of overlapping between institutionalized and non-institutionalized boys is here specified more closely than has been done in previous research. We have cited only the maxi-

J. W. RILEY, AND JACKSON TOBY, *SCALE ANALYSIS*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1954), Chapter 18.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to compare these findings with results of the delinquency scale of the California Psychological Inventory, as obtained by Gough. Comparing a broad cross section of delinquents (as indicated by their being institutionalized or classed as "high school disciplinary problems") and non-delinquents on this scale, he found a cutting point above which 70 per cent of his male delinquents fell, as compared to 20 per cent of his male non-delinquents. See HARRISON GOUGH, *Systematic Validation of a Test for Delinquency*, paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, 1954 (mimeographed).

TABLE IV

DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR SCORES OF HIGH SCHOOL  
AND TRAINING SCHOOL GIRLS AGED  
16 AND 17\*

Scale Type	Delinquent Behavior score	High School		Training School	
		Fre- quency	Cumula- tive Percent	Fre- quency	Cumula- tive Percent
1	00	135	26	1	2
2	01	72	40	0	2
3	02	21	44	1	4
4	03	74	59	1	6
5	04	61	71	0	6
6	05	52	81	0	6
7	06	15	84	1	8
8	07	11	86	1	10
9	08	22	90	0	10
10	09	10	92	1	12
11	10	23	97	6	25
12	11	9	99	4	33
13	12	2	99	7	48
14	13	5	100	25	100
		512		48	

\* No scores were obtained for two training school and one high school girls.

mum differences between the two groups. Thus, if we were to study "delinquent" and "non-delinquent" boys by comparing our institutionalized and non-institutionalized groups, on the basis of the seven-item scale we would in fact be studying a group of delinquent boys, 14 percent of whom are less delinquent than are 14 percent of the "non-delinquent" boys. Comparisons can, of course, be obtained at any point along the scale.

A nine-item scale for the sixteen and seventeen year old western high school and training school girls differentiates somewhat more clearly between the two groups.<sup>16</sup> On this scale a maximum difference of 80 percent is found at scale type 09 (See Table IV). At this point on the scale 90.4 percent of the high school girls and only 10.4 percent of the training school girls are accounted for. That is, only about 10 percent of the high school girls are more delinquent than is indicated by scale type 08, while nearly 90 percent of the training school girls fall into this more delinquent category.

<sup>16</sup> The girls' scale consisted of the offenses included in the eleven item boys' scale, with the exception of taking things of large value and narcotics violations.

## SEX DIFFERENCES

Comparison of boys and girls within the high school sample indicates a higher proportion of boys committing nearly all offenses. With few exceptions such differences are statistically significant (at .01 level). This finding is similar to that revealed by official data, though the 5 to 1 ratio of boys to girls reported by the Children's Bureau<sup>17</sup> is not found in many cases, suggesting a bias in under-reporting female delinquency on the part of official data. Offenses for which significant differences between the sexes are not found are generally those offenses for which girls are most often apprehended, e.g. running away from home, defying parents' authority (incurability), and drinking. The fact that significantly higher proportions of boys in both samples report engaging in heterosexual relations and the fact that girls are most often referred to court for such activities presumably reflects society's greater concern for the unsupervised activities of girls.

Fewer statistically significant differences are found between training school boys and girls than was the case in our samples of high school students. Significantly greater percentages of the boys report committing 11 of the 24 offenses studied, and 13 of these offenses "more than once or twice." For nine of these offenses the recorded differences are not significant. Four of the offenses are reported by larger percentages of training school girls. These include running away from home, defying parents' authority, narcotics violations, and homosexual relations. A higher percentage of girls also report heterosexual relations, though this difference is not statistically significant. With the exception of narcotics violations, these are offenses for which girls are most often apprehended. The offenses reported by the highest percentage of training school boys, with the exception of fighting, which is a part of "growing up," are also those for which boys are most often apprehended, viz., stealing and traffic offenses.

## ARREST RATES

Arrest rates for the high school and training school samples described above are not available. Data from the first phase of our research program, comparing college and training school students,

<sup>17</sup> U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social Security Administration, Children's Bureau, *Juvenile Court Statistics, 1955*, CHILDREN'S BUREAU STATISTICAL SERIES, Number 37.

indicates that non-institutionalized (college) students experience arrest in a far smaller proportion of offenses which they report committing than do training school students.<sup>18</sup> This is especially true of girls, for college girls report arrests only for traffic offenses. These arrest data bear a close relationship to officially available data. For both training school boys and girls arrest rates are highest for offenses against the person exclusive of sex offenses. Arrest rates for property offenses are more than twice as high among boys as among girls in the training school populations, while the reverse is true of sex offenses among these groups. Arrests among college men are reported in only a small percentage of property offenses (.3 percent as compared to 13.7 percent for training school boys), behavior problem offenses (2.3 percent compared to 15.1 percent for training school boys), and "casual" offenses (1.9 percent compared to 5.2 percent).

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISTRIBUTION

Finally, the socio-economic characteristics associated with delinquent behavior among our high school and training school populations have been studied.<sup>19</sup> For this purpose analysis of delinquent behavior by individual behavior items and by scale type was made, holding constant sex categories and two age groups in the western and midwestern states. Similar analysis was made for adolescents 16 and older in the "training schools" of the western state. Few significant differences were found between socio-economic strata. Such differences as were found indicated greater delinquent involvement within the highest socio-economic category as often as in the lowest.

#### CONCLUSIONS

While recognizing the limitations of our definition of delinquent behavior, in terms of the behavior categories studied, and the limitations of the samples employed, it appears that the following tentative conclusions regarding the extent of juvenile delinquency in the non-institutionalized population are warranted:

<sup>18</sup> JAMES F. SHORT, JR., *A Report on the Incidence of Criminal Behavior, Arrests, and Convictions in Selected Groups*, PROC. OF THE PACIFIC SOCIOLOGICAL SOC., 1954, published as Vol. 22, No. 2 of RESEARCH STUDIES OF THE STATE COLLEGE OF WASHINGTON (June, 1954), 110-118, see Table 3, P. 117.

<sup>19</sup> F. IVAN NYE, JAMES F. SHORT, JR., AND V. J. OLSON, *Socio-Economic Status and Delinquent Behavior*, THE AMER. JOUR. OF SOCIOLOGICAL SOC., LXIII, January, 1958.

1. Delinquent conduct in the non-institutionalized population is extensive and variable;

2. Delinquent conduct as we have measured it is similar in extent and nature among non-institutionalized high school students in widely separated sections of the country;

3. Delinquent conduct reported by institutionalized and non-institutionalized students is similar to delinquency and crime as treated officially in the following respects:

(1) sex ratio—non-institutionalized boys admit committing virtually all delinquencies more frequently than do non-institutionalized girls, "once or twice" and "more than once or twice;" fewer differences exist, and these differences are smaller, between institutionalized boys and girls;

(2) the offenses for which boys are most often arrested are generally those which they most often admit committing, e.g., property offenses, traffic violations, truancy, destruction of property, drinking; a few offenses are reported by large proportions of boys which are not often recorded in official statistics, e.g., game violations and fist fights;

(3) the offenses for which girls are most often arrested are, with the exception of sex offenses among high school girls, generally the offenses which girls most often admit committing, e.g., sex offenses, incorrigibility, running away. A few offenses are reported by high proportions of girls which do not find their way into official statistics;

(4) significantly greater proportions of training school boys and girls admit committing virtually all delinquencies, and admit committing them more frequently, than do high school boys and girls;

(5) when training school students are compared with high school students on a composite scale of delinquency activities there is considerable overlapping between groups of both boys and girls, but training school students as a group rank significantly higher, in terms of seriousness of involvement in delinquent behavior, than do high school students;

(6) differences on the delinquency scales, and in the commission of individual delinquencies, are greater between high school and training school girls than between high school and training school boys;

(7) variation in the proportion of reported delinquencies which result in arrest are similar to variations in the "cleared by arrest" figures

collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

4. Delinquent conduct reported by non-institutionalized students differs from official data in the following ways:

(1) arrests—comparison of college and training school students indicates that training school students are arrested in higher proportions of all classes of delinquencies which they admit committing than college students;

(2) socio-economic status—delinquency within the non-institutionalized populations studied is distributed more evenly throughout the socio-economic structure of society than are official cases, which are found disproportionately in the lower socio-economic strata.

Further research of this nature may be expected

to provide additional clues as to the extent and nature of delinquent behavior in various segments of the population. By such means the structural correlates of delinquency, together with other important etiological considerations, may be better understood. Reported delinquent behavior as a method warrants and requires further investigation.<sup>20</sup> The present status of research by reported behavior is regarded as still in a pioneer stage. It provides an alternative to the use of institutionalized populations and court records, with new opportunities for research in delinquent behavior and comprehension of it.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of advantages, as well as methodological problems of this approach, see SHORT AND NYE, *Reported Behavior as a Criterion of Deviant Behavior*, *op. cit.*