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PRISONERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD HOME AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM¹

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Nearly two decades have passed since Tolman² commented upon the paucity of information available about the attitudes of convicted adult criminals towards the public system of law enforcement and justice. In the interim there seems to have been only one serious attempt to elicit expressions of these attitudes, but this was as a part of the more general study of the "Authoritarian Personality"³. While it would be rash to suggest that the creation of attitudes in the criminal which are favorable to public and legal morality would necessarily lead to an abandonment of criminal activities, it is generally conceded that the establishment of such attitudes is among the legitimate goals of rehabilitation. The devising of methods for achieving this will be limited by our knowledge of the origin and character of the attitudes of the criminal. As part of a continuing study of the total problem, the present study reports the results of an investigation of two factors which seem to be pertinent. These are (1) the relationship between attitudes towards law and justice and attitudes towards home and parents and (2) the influence of this relationship upon the type of offense committed. If the rejection of the demands of society for moral behavior is regarded as an effect of an earlier rejection of parental authority, it is feasible to assume that measures of these two attitudes would be highly correlated. In effect they would be measures of a single, general attitude of rejection of

authority of any kind. On the other hand it appears unlikely that all criminal acts would be usefully interpreted as symptomatic of rebellion in this way. Economic motives, sexual maladjustments and other variables play highly significant roles in the genesis of crime and it therefore seems likely that the crime which is related to anti-authority attitudes is more likely to be a crime involving personal violence and hostility rather than material profit or sexual satisfactions.

In the light of these considerations two general hypotheses were formulated for study. The first is that in a criminal population attitudes of acceptance-rejection of legal morality will be positively correlated with attitudes towards the home and parents. Secondly, that this relationship will be significantly greater in some types of crime than in others.

METHOD

Subjects: Seventy-four adult male prisoners were selected from the inmate population of a state penitentiary. The prisoners were selected on the basis of a five-fold classification of crimes. These classes were murder, violent crimes (including armed robbery, assault and battery), non-violent theft (including unarmed robbery, burglary and larceny), "intellectual" crimes (including fraud, forgery and embezzlement) and sexual offenses (all types). The numbers of subjects in these groups were 20, 10, 18, 16 and 10 respectively. As the test instruments required a certain minimal standard of literacy of the subject this represented a factor in the self-selection of the group.

Attitude Scales: Two measuring instruments were used. Each one was used to provide two measures, one for each of the two attitudes under investigation—attitudes towards law and justice

¹ The writers wish to express their appreciation to Warden J. E. Overlade and Mr. Robert P. Heyne for their generous cooperation in securing data for this investigation.

² TOLMAN, RUTH S. *Some differences in attitudes between groups of repeating criminals and first offenders.* J. CRIM. LAW AND CRIMINOL. 1939, 30, 196-203.

³ ADORNO, T. W., FRENKEL BRUNSWIK, ELSE, LEVINSON, D. J., AND SANFORD, R. N. *THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY*, New York: Harper, 1950.

FIGURE 1
INCOMPLETE SENTENCES BLANK

Complete these sentences to express *your real feelings*. Try to do every one. Be sure to make a complete sentence.

1. Teen-agers _____
2. With women I am _____
3. Back home _____
4. My trial _____
5. My intelligence _____
6. Marriage _____
7. Justice _____
8. Childhood _____
9. Drink _____
10. My greatest fear _____
11. Any cop _____
12. My personality _____
13. A man's wife _____
14. Strict laws _____
15. When I was a child _____
16. People treat me _____
17. A prisoner should be _____
18. All my life _____
19. My religion _____
20. Our laws _____
21. I regret _____
22. Other people _____
23. My father _____
24. Only a sucker _____
25. The future _____
26. After death _____
27. I trust _____
28. A judge _____
29. A mother _____
30. My luck _____
31. I pray _____
32. An honest policeman _____
33. Punishment _____
34. I feel sad _____
35. If I could be someone else _____
36. Witnesses _____
37. I _____
38. Strict discipline for a child _____
39. Under certain circumstances crime _____
40. The happiest time _____

which is to be completed by the testee to make a sentence. The introductory words (sentence stems) are selected so as to elicit expressions of opinion on predetermined topics. Modifications

FIGURE 2

SCORING EXAMPLES FOR I.S.B. LAW & JUSTICE

- 5: PRAISE, APPROVAL, CONFORMITY, EXTREMELY POSITIVE.
Examples:
Any cop . . . is our friend in need.
Our laws . . . are unequalled by any other nation.
- 4: MILD APPROVAL, MEDIUM CONFORMITY.
Examples:
A judge . . . is a good man.
My trial . . . was a fair one.
- 3: NEUTRAL, DEFINITION, DESCRIPTION.
Examples:
Witnesses . . . are found in court.
An honest policeman . . . is one who will not take a bribe.
- 2: MILD DISAPPROVAL, MEDIUM REJECTION, CRITICISM.
Examples:
My trial . . . did not get at all the truth.
Our laws . . . should be revised.
- 1: EXTREME DISAPPROVAL, NON-CONFORMITY, VERY NEGATIVE.
Examples:
Justice . . . stinks.
Any cop . . . is a burro's anus.

HOME & PARENTS

- 5: ACCEPTANCE, STRONG PARENTAL ATTACHMENT, HAPPY HOME.
Examples:
My father . . . was a wonderful man.
The happiest time . . . was at home with my folks.
- 4: MILD ATTACHMENT, PLEASANT EXPERIENCE AT HOME.
Examples:
Childhood . . . was happy for me.
Back home . . . is where I long to go.
- 3: NEUTRAL, DEFINITION, DESCRIPTION, NARRATIVE.
Examples:
A mother . . . keeps house and raises kids.
When I was a child . . . I played ball.
- 2: MILD REJECTION, CRITICISM, UNHAPPY HOME.
Examples:
Childhood . . . was hard for me.
A mother . . . can be too possessive.
- 1: EXTREME REJECTION, VERY UNHAPPY HOME.
Examples:
My father . . . was brutal to me.
When I was a child . . . there was much loneliness, fear, and prejudice.

and attitudes towards home and parents. The first test instrument was a modification of the Rotter⁴ Incomplete Sentences Blank and the other a direct scale of a questionnaire type. Incomplete Sentences Blank (ISB): This test, which is presented in Figure 1, consists of a printed blank containing 40 separate words or phrases, each of

⁴ ROTTER, JULIAN B. AND RAFFERTY, JANET E. THE ROTTER INCOMPLETE SENTENCES BLANK MANUAL. New York: The Psychological Corp., 1950.

FIGURE 3

OPINION QUESTIONNAIRE

Mark the statements which you agree with in the first column, those you disagree with in the second column, and those you have no opinion about in the third column.

| AGREE | Dis- AGREE | No OPINION | |
|-------|---------------|---------------|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 1. Cops often carry a grudge against men who get in trouble with the law and treat them cruelly. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 2. For the most part, justice gets done by the police and the courts. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 3. Many of the people in prisons are actually innocent of the crimes they were convicted for. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 4. Most policemen are honest. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 5. Any jury can be fixed and most of them are fixed. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 6. We would have less crime if our laws were more strict. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 7. The big-time crooks never got arrested in this country. It's just the little guy that gets caught. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 8. Most judges are honest and kind-hearted. |

Answer these questions in the same way. Mark "yes" in the first column, "no" in the second column, and "no opinion" in the third.

| | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 1. If you could choose your parents, would you choose to have been born in some other family? |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 2. Do you respect your father? |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 3. Was your home as happy and secure as you would have wanted it to be? |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 4. Do you think your parents were too strict with you when you were a child? |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 5. Young people are too reckless and interested in having a good time rather than in taking responsibility and planning for the future. Do you agree with this statement? |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 6. Did your parents love you as much as most parents love their children? |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 7. Did your parents ever fail in their duty to you? |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | 8. Did your parents take a great deal of interest in you? |

were made in the usual form of the blank so as to include stems which would be relevant to the attitudes in question. In a pilot group of 20 prisoners a sixty-stem version of the test was given and scored. The 20 stems, which produced the least variability in response, were then eliminated from the final version used in the main study. Scoring of both the pilot and final versions of the test was based upon a five point scale along a dimension of acceptance-rejection. The scale, and examples of scale values of responses are given in Figure 2. Each response was examined by the examiner who (a) decided whether it referred to one or other of the two attitudes or whether it dealt with a non-relevant attitude, and (b) if it was regarded as pertinent to attitudes towards law and justice or home and parents, assigned a scale score. From these response scores, two means were calculated, one for each attitude. As a check on scorer reliability a random sample of 20 subject means was selected and the same responses scored by an independent examiner.⁵ The coefficient of

correlation between these two examiners was +0.966, which was regarded as satisfactory.

Direct Questionnaire:⁶ This measure consisted of 16 items each requiring the subject to express agreement, disagreement or indifference to general statements about law and justice, or home and parents. The format of the questionnaire is presented in Figure 3. Items were so arranged that an answer of "agree" would indicate an accepting attitude on one half of them and a rejecting attitude on the other half. Responses were scored by a ratio which took account of positive, negative and neutral answers. The ratio was calculated by dividing the percentage of positive answers by the sum of the percentages of positive and negative answers. The maximum value this ratio could assume would be 1.00.

RESULTS

Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated between the two attitudes for each test,

⁵ The writers wish to thank Mr. Charles Hulin who assisted in this aspect of the investigation.

⁶ Major assistance in the construction of this questionnaire was provided by Dr. Donald T. Campbell.

TABLE 1
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN DIRECT AND INDIRECT
TEST ON EACH ATTITUDE GROUP

| Group | Attitude toward Law & Justice | | Attitude toward Home & Parents | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| | Corre- lation | Signifi- cance | Corre- lation | Signifi- cance |
| Murder | +.622 | .01 | +.493 | .05 |
| Non-violent | +.788 | .01 | +.788 | .01 |
| Intellectual | -.119 | Nil | +.695 | .01 |
| Sex offenders | +.520 | Nil | +.544 | Nil |
| Violent | +.266 | Nil | +.310 | Nil |
| All prisoners | +.526 | .01 | +.416 | .01 |

for the total group and for each crime group individually.

With one exception the correlations fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance on either of the two tests. The murder group produced a correlation of +0.466 on the ISB which is significant at the .05 level. While this is in line with the general hypothesis, the sheer number of correlations calculated is such that this difference should be interpreted with caution.

If the two kinds of measuring instruments used in this study are measuring the same attitudinal variables, the correlations between the tests on each attitude for each group should be statistically significant. Product-moment correlations were calculated for the appropriate pairings of scores, the results being presented in Table 1. From this table it is apparent that there is a high degree of general relationship between the measures used when the correlation is calculated over the total prison group, and that it falls short of significance only in those offense groups in which the total number of scores to correlate is very small. Generally speaking, it seems to be reasonable to conclude that the test instruments were substantially the same attitudes in this group of subjects.

A final analysis of the data concerns the strength of the attitudes held by the different offense groups. The difference between the mean values of the groups' scores was tested for significance by the conventional *t* test. None of the differences achieved significance.

DISCUSSION

The data obtained in this study offer no support for the hypothesis that criminal attitudes towards the law are a reflection of attitudes developed towards home and parental figures. One exception to this finding occurs with the group of convicted murderers, but requires cautious interpretation pending cross-validation. Failure to find the hypothesised relationship may be due to inadequacy of the measuring instruments used.

This possibility is to some extent mitigated by the correlations achieved between two separate measures and the general congruence of their rejection of the hypotheses under scrutiny. However, a further and possibly more potent consideration is the question of the unidimensionality of the attitudes. Inspection of the subjects' responses to the ISB suggested that the attitude toward law and justice could profitably be broken down into expressions of attitude toward the legal system in general and attitude towards the prisoner's personal experiences with law officers. Thus the same subject could state "Our laws are the best in the world" and "My trial was unjust" without detecting any contradiction in these responses.

In the light of this latter observation further research was planned to investigate the independence of general versus experiential attitudes towards the law in a similar population. From the data of the present study it must be concluded that the hypothesis that a criminal's attitude towards the law is a function of his attitude towards parental figures is unsupported.

CONCLUSION

Investigation of 74 adult male criminals serving prison sentences lends no support to the hypothesis that the attitudes of these subjects toward public law and morality is a function of their acceptance or rejection of parental figures. These findings come from two separate measures of each of the two attitudes under investigation; one a direct and the other an indirect measure. The possibility that attitudes towards the law and justice have several independent components gains some support from observation of subject responses to the indirect measure and a possible dichotomy of general versus experiential or specific attitude was suggested. Further research on this latter point is in progress.