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STABILITIES IN DEVIANCE: A STUDY OF ASSAULTIVE AND NON-ASSAULTIVE OFFENDERS*

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Can most offenders be classified as either (1) offenders against persons; *i.e.*, violent offenders, or (2) offenders against property, *i.e.*, non-violent offenders, but not as both? In an attempt to answer this question, the authors analyzed the arrest histories of a sample group of cases chosen from the records of the St. Louis Police Department. In addition, they made an intensive study of 19 male criminals, most of them in psychiatric hospitals, to determine the psychiatric and social differences between the violent and non-violent offenders in this group. In the following article, the authors present their findings and discuss the implications of these studies.—EDITOR.

Traditionally, both sociological and psychiatric studies of criminal behavior have followed one of two distinct orientations. A number of investigators¹ have concentrated on the global nature of crime and delinquency. They assume that crime is a single generic behavioral entity which allows the comparison of all criminals with all non-criminals. The other group of investigators has focused attention on either the sociological or the psychiatric aspects of a specific type of crime, for example, trust violation,² naive check forgery,³ white collar crime,⁴ chronic public intoxication,⁵ and homicide.⁶ Less frequently used is a third orientation which has as its goal the systematic study of specific criminal activities in terms of limited and well delineated components, such as assaultive behavior, which could be present in the personality of any criminal offender. The dimension on which

the present study focuses is the assaultive component in criminal behavior, combining a sociological and psychiatric approach.

As an initial step in the sociological-psychiatric study of assaultive criminal behavior, the assumption was made that the two broad divisions into which the several legal categories are conventionally separated, *i.e.*, crimes against persons and crimes against property, have certain unique attributes which clearly set them apart from each other. The behavioral component characterizing crimes against persons is potential or actual deliberate assaultive behavior of one individual against another.⁷ Crimes against property are characterized chiefly by an attempt to gain possession of something rightfully belonging to another, and to gain this possession without the use of force.⁸ Preliminary identification of the differences

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¹ BROMBERG, *CRIME AND THE MIND* (1948); COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS* (1955); S. & E. GLUECK, *UNRAVELING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY* (1950); HEALY & BRONNER, *DELINQUENTS AND CRIMINALS* (1926).

² CRESSEY, *OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY* (1953).

³ Lemert, *An Isolation Closure Theory of Naive Check Forgery*, 44 *J. CRIM. L., C. & P. S.* 296 (1953).

⁴ CLINARD, *BLACK MARKET* (1952); SUTHERLAND, *WHITE COLLAR CRIME* (1949).

⁵ PITTMAN & GORDON, *REVOLVING DOOR: A STUDY OF THE CHRONIC POLICE CASE INEBRIATE* (1958).

⁶ WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* (1958).

⁷ Crimes against persons are defined for purposes of this study as those in the offense categories of criminal homicide, aggravated and simple assaults, and possession of concealed weapons. Rape is excluded because of the difficulty of distinguishing between forcible and statutory rape. The criminal classification scheme of the F. B. I.'s *Uniform Crime Reports*, revised in January, 1958, includes as an Index Crime only forcible rape, while statutory rape is classified with Other Crimes under Sex Offenses. Arrest records prior to 1958, on which this study is based, do not make this distinction.

⁸ Crimes against property are defined for purposes of this study as those including burglary, petty and grand larceny, auto theft, forgery, embezzlement, and traffic in stolen property. Robbery is not included. While legal authorities, as well as the F. B. I.'s *Uniform Crime Reports*, classify robbery as a crime against the person, many sociologists consider it a property violation. Since it involves the threat of force against persons to take property, robbery constitutes an ambiguous category with respect to our distinction of person and property violations.

between offenders in the two categories is attempted by two means: 1) by showing that individuals have stable patterns of deviance, tending to commit either violent or non-violent crimes, but not both; and 2) by exploring the social and psychiatric characteristics which may distinguish between individuals in the two groups.

METHOD OF STUDY

In order to show that individuals tend to commit either violent or non-violent crimes, but not both, the 1958 arrest records on file in the St. Louis Police Department were examined. Data were collected from these records relating to arrests made by the Department and all other arrests on record from the F.B.I., the Missouri State Highway Patrol, and other agencies. All males aged 40 and over arrested by the St. Louis Police Department in 1958 for criminal homicide, suspicion of homicide, aggravated assault, larceny, and burglary were included in an original sample of 119 offenders. The age of 40 was chosen as the minimum age so that individuals in the sample would have had an opportunity to stabilize their criminal patterns. The crimes listed above were chosen for study because they are the most serious offenses in each category, and because they were more likely than others to be known to the police and cleared by arrest.

Note was taken of the date and place of birth, race, and occupation of the arrestee as well as the nature, date, and disposition of each arrest.⁹ When there was no record that the F.B.I. fingerprint file had been checked by the St. Louis Police Department, the case was eliminated as incomplete. In all, 31 were eliminated, leaving a final sample of 88 cases. From all the information available on the arrest cards, it appeared there was no significant difference between the 31 eliminated cases and the final sample, except that the eliminated cases were older.¹⁰ In addition, arrest cards indicated that the final sample had characteristics of race and class

⁹ The St. Louis Police Department arrest card file goes back to 1927, but the F. B. I. fingerprint file is fragmentary at best until some years later. Thus, the early arrest record of the men 48 and older (half the sample) is probably somewhat incomplete.

¹⁰ There is no obvious reason to account for the significantly older age of eliminated cases; however, it may be a function of the selective process at work in the arresting procedure. The St. Louis police do not automatically make an F. B. I. fingerprint file check of all persons arrested for certain crimes, but check only "suspicious" or "notorious" characters, and it may well be that the older arrestee is not ascribed these characteristics.

similar to those of violators known to the police generally.

The 88 sample cases were classified by type of charge and age at arrest.¹¹ Thus, arrest records were analyzed to ascertain whether cases had assaultive, non-assaultive, neither, or both types of arrests.¹² The term "early record" was used to designate all arrests during the first 29 years of life; "late record" designated all arrests since age 30, with the exception of the 1958 arrest on the basis of which the case entered the sample.

To explore the social and psychiatric differential characteristics of violent and non-violent offenders, 19 other cases, drawn largely from psychiatric hospitals, were interviewed intensively. The data collected consisted of social case histories, selected pictures from the Rosensweig Picture-Frustration Test,¹³ and a psychiatric symptom inventory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 88 sample cases of men 40 years of age and older arrested in St. Louis during 1958 for assaultive, non-assaultive, neither, and both types of crimes are classified by type of arrest and age at arrest in Table I. Eighty of the 88 cases, or 91 per cent, present a pattern of stable deviancy (Table I). Individuals are classified as having stable deviancy patterns if their records are marked by the exclusive commission of either assaultive person or non-assaultive property crimes. The eight cases showing unstable patterns of deviancy, *i.e.*, the commission of both property and person crimes, will be analyzed in detail below. Eliminating the 29 cases who have never been arrested for either assaultive or non-assaultive violations

¹¹ On the assumption that arrest records bear less relationship to behavior than do convictions, a wholly new classification like that of Table I was set up in which a requisite component was conviction, not simply arrest. All arrests without conviction were classed "suspicion." Anticipating our later discussion of the violence versus property violations hypothesis, using convictions rather than arrests does not help clarify the muddy cases, for those cases which are mixed are well mixed. The only notable consequence of using convictions is a large increase in the number of cases in the "neither" category.

¹² Preliminary examination of the data showed that the number of persons with apparently unstable deviancy patterns would be sharply reduced if a single arrest for petty larceny, embezzlement, fraud, or stolen property did not make an otherwise "person" violator into an unstable case, and if, likewise, a single act of common assault or possession of concealed weapons did not make an otherwise "property" violator into an unstable case.

¹³ Rosensweig, Fleming & Clarke, *Revised Scoring Manual for the Rosensweig Picture-Frustration Study*, 24 J. PSYCHOLOGY 165 (1949).

previous to the current charge, 51 of the remaining 59 cases show arrests for non-assaultive or assaultive violations but not both. Thus, 86 per cent of all prior arrestees in our sample show patterns of stable deviancy in terms of person and property crimes.¹⁴ Therefore, our major hypothesis that persons are arrested for assaultive crimes or non-assaultive crimes, but not both, has, within the current sample, been solidly confirmed.

UNSTABLE DEVIANCY PATTERN

As noted above, eight persons showed unstable deviancy patterns. Crimes against property tend to be committed by young persons and assaultive crimes by relatively older people, according to the F.B.I.'s *Uniform Crime Reports*. One might predict, therefore, that persons arrested for both types of violations would be arrested for crimes against property in their youth and for assaultive crimes when older. Table I, however, shows that of the eight cases with unstable patterns of deviance, only one shows a record of property offense (only) in the early record and person offense (only) in the late record. Because of the possibility that arrests for both types of crime during one time period might be an artifact of the cutting point for age, these arrest records were examined in detail; however, it was found impossible to adjust the age cut-off for any of the seven cases so as to separate violent crimes from non-violent crimes. Put simply, these mixed cases were well mixed.

Police arrest cards afford little information relevant to social or personality dynamics; however, these eight cases with unstable deviancy patterns differ rather markedly from the rest of the sample in a number of ways. They have been arrested far more often than the average for the final sample. Their mean number of arrests is 52.3, and only one case has as few as 11, the median number of arrests for the final sample. The distribution of arrest frequency is markedly bimodal, one peak of the curve centering around 20 and the other around 90. Their higher total arrests cannot be ascribed to age, for their median age is only 42, and only one of the eight is older than the final sample median. For most, the current (current is defined as the two years preceding arrest) rate of arrest is extremely high; in the 24 months prior to the date the cases were coded, they had been

¹⁴ Evaluated by means of the binomial distribution, a split as uneven as 8 and 51 has a probability of occurring, in a population with an even split, less than one time in a thousand.

TABLE I
TYPE OF ARREST AT AGE OF ARREST FOR ENTIRE
SAMPLE

Late Record > 30	Early Record < 30			
	Person (Assaultive) Offenders	Property (Non-Assaultive) Offenders	Neither	Both
Person (Assaultive) Offenders	16**	1††	13**	0
Property (Non-Assaultive) Offenders	0	9*	4*	2††
Neither	4**	5*	29†	1††
Both	0	0	1††	3††

† Arrest for neither person nor property offense.

†† Unstable pattern of deviance, i.e., arrest for both person and property offenses.

* Stable pattern of deviance—property offense only (18 individuals).

** Stable pattern of deviance—person offense only (33 individuals).

arrested from 2 to 17 times, with a mean number of arrests of 11.2. All eight have arrests for disorderly conduct, and three have more than ten arrests in the drunk and disorderly syndrome, while a fourth adds vagrancy to this pattern. There is not a single arrest for murder in the group, and their larcenies tend to be petty. Thus, the picture of the violator with an unstable deviancy pattern is not that of the hardened criminal who has made crime a business, but rather that of the frequently-arrested nuisance offender.¹⁵

CASE STUDIES

In order to explore the dynamics of aggressivity in criminal behavior, 19 male criminals, 9 violent and 10 non-violent, have been studied intensively. The data are presented not so much to establish generalizations, but rather to suggest hypotheses. The findings are not in any degree final, but rather suggest leads for further research. The sample (unrelated to the sample of 88 previously discussed) was drawn from recent admissions to a state mental hospital for the criminally insane, a diagnostic hospital, and a post-imprisonment rehabilitation center. These cases may not be typical of offenders generally, but there are no differences in the bases for assignment into the

¹⁵ O'Neal & Robins, *The Relation of Childhood Behavior Problems to Adult Psychiatric Status: A 30 Year Follow-Up Study of 150 Subjects*, 114 AM. J. PSYCHIATRY 961 (1958).

violent and non-violent subsamples. The proportion of Negroes is greater in the violent group; however, the samples are equivalent in age, social class, and ethnic origins.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from an examination of the social case histories is that the quality of childhood experience is different for violent as compared with non-violent offenders, in spite of the fact that almost all members of both groups have lower class origins. The non-violent cases more often came from homes of skilled laborers, while violent cases more often came from homes where the family was dependent on public support. Four of the ten non-violent cases and seven of the nine violent cases grew up in homes broken by death, divorce, or desertion of one parent while the offender was living at home. Only one of the non-violent cases came from a home broken before the offender was seven years old, while five of the seven violent cases came from homes first broken when the subject was no more than four. The homes of violent cases were broken more often in that each had on the average more than four parents and parent substitutes, while non-violent cases each had on the average something under three. The violent cases show striking similarity in the relationships in the nuclear family. Six of the nine violent, but only one of the non-violent, cases had strict but erratic fathers or father-substitutes and developed close romantic attachments to their mothers or mother-substitutes. By contrast, four of the non-violent had strict "nagging" mothers and permissive or indifferent fathers, while no violent offenders came from this type of family milieu. Seven of the nine violent cases had close relatives who showed evidence of being psychotic or were chronic criminals, while only three of the ten non-violent cases grew up in families providing role models of a psychotic or clearly anti-social nature. Bringing together all these findings, the childhoods of violent and non-violent offenders appear strikingly different. The former experienced early and often continuous disruption in the nuclear family, while the latter experienced disruption later and to a lesser degree. As will be shown below, the violent cases as a group are more psychiatrically disturbed.

About half of each group belonged to anti-social gangs. The gangs to which violent offenders belonged had as their prime interests gang fighting and rolling drunks, while the prime activity of the gangs in which non-violent offenders participated was theft. Several of the subjects who were never

TABLE II
SCORES ON THE ROSENWEIG PICTURE-
FRUSTRATION TEST*

Response	Violent Offenders	Non-Violent Offenders
<i>Acceptance of Frustration:</i>		
Accept frustration.....	2	15
Rationalize acceptance of frustration.....	0	15
Apologize, make restitution...	0	2
Withdraw.....	0	5
Total.....	2	37
<i>Overcome Frustration:</i>		
Deny assertion, or responsibility.....	13	5
Excuse action as necessary....	8	1
Verbal or physical attack.....	11	1
Total.....	32	7
<i>All Other Responses:</i>		
Equivocation.....	6	11
Situation tension.....	7	8
Reject stimulus.....	6	0
Inappropriate response.....	1	1
Total.....	20	20

* Responses to Pictures 8, 10, 16, and 23 coded.

members of gangs had records of both violent and non-violent anti-social acts in their early teens. It is as if role identities were being tried during this period of life, and as if gang experience and individual experimentation helped to channelize the anti-social activity along lines best satisfying psychic needs.

In testing the hypothesis that assaultive criminal behavior is part of a more generalized, socially disapproved aggressivity, five pictures from the revised form of the Rosensweig Picture-Frustration Test¹⁶ were shown to all cases. The Picture-Frustration Test consists of a set of outline drawings, each depicting several persons in a rather obvious social situation. One of the persons has just made a statement, and the respondent is asked to give the reply the other might make. In the first picture used, for example, two young men are talking. The first says, "Your girl friend invited me to the dance tonight—she said you weren't

¹⁶ Rosensweig, Fleming & Clarke, *supra* note 13.

going." Answers ranged from; "If she is not going with me, she is not going at all," to "I don't know, O.K. I guess." Each of the pictures involves a frustration of the wishes of the respondent.

It was hypothesized that non-aggressive cases would more often accept the frustration, while aggressive cases would more often attempt to overcome it by aggressive activity. One of the items was eliminated from consideration because almost all subjects made simple cognitive responses. Data from the other four pictures are presented in Table II. Non-aggressive subjects significantly more often accepted the frustration, while aggressive subjects significantly more often attempted to overcome the frustration. Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed suggesting that assaultive criminal behavior is part of a more generalized, socially disapproved aggressivity.

The psychiatric diagnoses were made on the basis of a 105-item psychiatric symptom inventory and a review of social case histories. Criminal activity *per se* was not used as a basis for evaluation. All 19 cases were adjudged to be suffering from one of the more serious mental illnesses—specifically, schizophrenia or sociopathic personality. The gravity of psychiatric disorder is not surprising in the light of the source of the sample. Six of the violent cases were diagnosed as schizophrenic and three as sociopathic personalities. Five of the non-violent cases were diagnosed as schizophrenic, four as sociopathic personalities, and one as manic-depressive, depressed. Thus, there was no clear difference in diagnostic categories between violent and nonviolent samples. This lack of noticeable difference in diagnosis is in part due to the criteria, currently used in psychiatric diagnosis, which give no specific indication of the severity of the disorder. It is our clinical impression that the persons in the violent category were more profoundly disturbed in more areas of their lives than persons in the non-violent category. This observation is sup-

ported by two items of information from the social case histories: the violent cases had a higher rate of suicide attempts, and they were more frequently homosexual.

Perhaps the most striking finding of this aspect of the study is that the mental disorder of the offender had been obvious, in most cases, for a considerable number of years. Almost all of the offenders had been institutionalized in juvenile detention homes, prisons, or infrequently for short periods in mental hospitals. Despite their repeated contact with institutions, nothing had been done either to treat their disorders or to protect society from these potentially dangerous people. Put positively, this study indicates that it is possible to predict from reliable public records what type of crime a person will commit. Furthermore, there is a good indication that it will be possible, after more intense study, to predict who will commit serious crimes of a violent or non-violent nature.

CONCLUSIONS

Four main conclusions can be drawn from the study:

1. An analysis of police records indicates that offenders have stable patterns of deviancy, being arrested for crimes of violence or crimes against property, but not for both sorts of crime.
2. As indicated from the 19 cases studied intensively, violent offenders come from homes more disrupted in the earliest years of life than those of non-violent offenders.
3. Projective test materials indicate that violent offenders show a higher level of generalized aggressivity as compared with non-violent offenders.
4. The psychiatric material showed no difference in the category of diagnosis between violent and non-violent offenders in this sample, drawn largely from psychiatric hospitals; however, the violent group appeared more profoundly disturbed.